

In Search of the 'Racist White Psyche':  
Racism and the Psychology of Prejudice in  
American Social Thought, 1930-1960

By

Jonathan C. Hagel

B.A. Lehigh University, 1998

M.A. Lehigh University, 2000

A.M., Brown University, 2001

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Signature Page

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Jonathan Cody Hagel was born in Huntington, New York on September 14, 1976. He attended Lehigh University, earning the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History in 1998, *summa cum laude*, as well as membership in *Phi Beta Kappa*. He was awarded the degree of Masters of Arts in American Studies from Lehigh University in 2000. That fall, he entered the graduate program in Modern American History at Brown University, where he earned a Masters Degree in American History in 2001. During his tenure there, he served as a teaching assistant and an instructor in courses on the history of the United States.

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Jonathan C. Hagel  
Lawrence, Kansas  
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**Introduction:**  
**In Search of ‘The Racist White Psyche’:**  
**Racism and the Psychology of Prejudice in American Social Thought, 1930-1960**

“The race question involves the saving of black America’s body and white America’s soul.”

—James Weldon Johnson, 1934

In the early pages of his landmark study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy*, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal made the implications of his research clear to his readers. In case the heavily footnoted study, awash in the lexicon of professional social science, came across as marginal to the pressing political and social conflicts of his reader’s time, Myrdal asserted its relevance in dramatic terms. The question of why prejudice plagued American society was not an arcane one to occupy the minds of professional scholars. It was, instead, a question that spoke to the great moral dilemma at the heart of human history. “This question is, in fact, only a special variant of the enigma of philosophers for several thousands of years: the problem of Good and Evil in the world.” Researched in the late 1930s, written amidst the global tumult of 1940 and 1941, and finally published in 1944, Myrdal’s book defined racism as just such a problem for a generation of Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly a thousand pages long, drawing from perhaps the greatest assemblage of scientific research into the collective experience of a single group of people, Myrdal’s book sounded out the myriad social, economic, and political barriers that confronted African Americans in their struggle for equality and justice. Myrdal commissioned more

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<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964 [1944]), 79.

than thirty research reports on various phases of African American life from the leading lights of the American Academy, black as well as white. And, he carried on countless conversations with experts on race and race relations, black as well as white. In this regard, his book stands as a paragon of grand, collaborative sociological analyses of American life, the highest embodiment of the meliorist, liberal assumption that shining the light of science on social problems marked the first step toward their solution. By this light, few Americans could avoid seeing the “Negro problem” for what it was—a historic injustice perpetrated on black Americans by white Americans. Moreover, cast against the backdrop of the struggle against fascism and the emerging postwar global order—a backdrop that Myrdal went to great lengths to fill in—the “Negro problem” affronted American democracy, and alienated the hundreds of millions of ‘colored’ peoples around the globe who looked to the United States as a beacon in a dangerous world.<sup>2</sup>

But, for Myrdal, the oppression of African Americans alone did not constitute ‘the American dilemma.’ What made “the Negro problem” into a ‘dilemma’ was how it sat in the “white man’s mind.” White Americans, Myrdal asserted, bore responsibility for the problem, but they had—since the Civil War, at least—sought either to ignore their culpability, or to explain it away. Myrdal aimed to illuminate this shadowy corner of the American Mind. In contrast to his effort to understand African American life, which was nothing short of exhaustive, his exploration of psychology of white racism took a very different tack. Discarding what little scientific research was available, he relied instead on

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on Myrdal is voluminous. See, David W Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations the Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Walter A Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).



his own personal encounters with white Americans.<sup>3</sup> He gathered most of this research during a tour of the United States in the fall of 1939, his second such sojourn. With Howard University political scientist Ralph Bunche and radical southern sociologist Arthur Raper alternating in the role of Beaumont to his de Tocqueville, Myrdal set out in search of white racial prejudice. Everywhere he went, the Swede asked white Americans what they thought about the “Negro problem.” Northern whites responded to his inquiries with a mix of “opportunistic ignorance,” as he called it, and condescension toward the South as the real problem. In the South, his interlocutors responded with well-rehearsed orations on the unique history of the region, the peculiarities of “the Negro,” and assurances that “there is no Negro problem.” To Myrdal, the protestations of both belied an underlying truth: “the Negro problem” was on *everyone’s* mind, and plagued every American conscience. Ticking just below the surface of polite discussion, ready to detonate at the right provocation, these “explosives,” he wrote, “must be handled with care.”<sup>4</sup>

Myrdal converted his survey of the white American psyche into a theory of American racism that served to frame his larger study. “The American Negro problem is a problem in the heart of the American,” he famously wrote. “It is there that the interracial tension has its focus. It is there that the decisive struggle goes on.” White Americans possessed a “split personality” when it came to their treatment of the Negro, born of their inculcation into two cultures. At one “plane of valuation,” as Myrdal called it, Americans believed in the “American Creed” of equality, Christian brotherhood, and

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<sup>3</sup> He did solicit a rudimentary study of white racial attitudes from the Columbia-trained psychologist Eugene Hartley (nee Horowitz), but he thought little of the report, and relegated the findings to an appendix, and a separate volume. See Otto Klineberg, *Characteristics of the American Negro* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944).

<sup>4</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 36.

democracy. Simultaneously, at a lower, more parochial level, they maintained their belief in white supremacy, bolstered by a deep-seated “race prejudice.” As such, the American Mind suffered from a nearly pathological level of anxiety and “moral uneasiness”—*guilt*.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this tension seemed to be increasing, as the national culture of the American Creed, carried by modern communication technology, standardized education, industrial capitalism, and geographical mobility—in a word, modernization—penetrated the spheres formerly dominated by the local traditions of white supremacy. Popular racial discourse served, in this regard, as ideology and “escape mechanism,” but one that seemed to Myrdal to be failing its primary function.<sup>6</sup> But, herein lied a solution to the ‘dilemma:’ Americans should complete the process of modernization, live fully by the values of the American Creed, and allow African Americans to integrate into American society. The solution was for *white* Americans to become simply *American*.

Myrdal’s notion of the ‘American dilemma’ of race became the dominant metaphor for the “race problem” in the postwar world. The significance of his book can hardly be overstated. By solidifying the alliance between social science and ameliorative liberalism around the American “Negro problem,” and thereby completing the reversal of the historic relationship between race and science, Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* established a liberal, scientific anti-racist discourse on white racial prejudice and racial equality. His book provided a new basis of authority for arguments against white supremacy—including the official American anti-racism laid out in President Harry S Truman’s signal *To Secure these Rights* (1947) and secured in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The “Negro problem” became a problem of white racism, and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., lxxvii.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 32–36.

particularly a problem of the psychology of white racial prejudice as a barrier to black inclusion in the main currents of American life. Although he recommended concerted attacks on all the bases of racial inequality, including the political and economic structures of black subjugation, Myrdal held that the weakest link in this system of “cumulative causation” was the prejudiced white psyche. As such, his book directed the social scientific research agenda of the 1950s toward the psychology of white “race prejudice,” a preoccupation that would dominate American intellectual life for more than a decade. More broadly, by linking his conception of white racism to long-standing themes of American national character, and suggesting an elite-driven program of modernization and development as the solution, his work fit perfectly the truncated ethos of Cold War liberalism.

Since the 1940s, Myrdal and his book have stood for liberal anti-racism writ large, and rightly so. His was the most well-funded, well-publicized, and comprehensive study of the social problem of race ever produced. His thesis—that white American guilt about the status of African Americans could be used to generate social change—resonated with both the spirit of American universalist triumphalism carried aloft by the victories over fascism and (Japanese) imperialism, as well as the attenuated, legalistic vision of racial reform promulgated during the postwar years. Likewise, his conception of black culture as a “pathological” variant of white American culture, born of racial exclusion, affirmed the normative value of the latter while placating wary white Americans by assuring them that the former was destined for dissolution. Myrdal envisioned the United States as a fundamentally good nation, possessed of a fundamentally egalitarian culture, both of which found vindication in the movement

towards integrating African Americans into society. As historian Nikhil Pal Singh has phrased it, Myrdal “cast racial equality as the *telos* of American nationhood.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, he saw his own searching, critical examination of the “Negro Problem” as the embodiment of the spirit of democratic flexibility, self-reflection, and change that made America exceptional. Further, the attack on racial exclusion served as the litmus test of the universal applicability of America’s brand of liberal nationalism and capitalist modernity, and thereby justified the extension of these ideals and way of life around the globe.

When Myrdal went in search of ‘the racist white psyche’ in the late 1930s, though, he was not the only anti-racist intellectual to do so. Of course, for many of his black collaborators, they never had to search; white racism found them, and they had been writing on the nature of their encounters for decades. But, for white social scientists and intellectuals, white racism was an uncharted territory. They vaguely understood its boundaries and surely felt the dangers that lurked within, but the contours, features, and fault lines of white racism remained largely undiscovered and unmapped. For white anti-racist intellectuals, then, the 1930s and 1940s was a new age of exploration. As such, Myrdal’s work has to be seen as a part a larger movement of leftist and liberal anthropologists, historians, social psychologists and psychologists, and other intellectuals, many of whose more incisive observations have remained hidden in the Swede’s justifiably long shadow. For this entire generation of intellectuals, the experience of searching for, encountering, and explaining the beliefs and behaviors of white people towards non-white people in the context of the twinned crises of modernity—the Great Depression and the rise of fascism—gave rise to novel conceptions

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<sup>7</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 135.

of “race prejudice.” Taken as a whole, their journeys turned white “race prejudice,” formerly thought of as a tragic necessity, an instinct, or an atavistic and irrational outburst of hatred, into a national social problem. Or, in other words, by going in search of white “race prejudice,” they drew a new map of American anti-racism.

Following the paths of these diverse travellers, I show that mid-century American anti-racism appears less like a contiguous ideological territory and more like a collection of distinct intellectual regions. Suffused with radical politics and a number of startling new ideas about society and the self, the 1930s and 1940s provided fertile ground for new thinking about white racial prejudice. Looking beyond Myrdal, scholars have recovered the variety of black anti-racist thinking from the period, much of it rooted in a tradition of radical thought that had long been succored by black intellectuals, and much of it marking the start of the modern civil rights movement.<sup>8</sup> Still other scholars have investigated the varieties of European anti-racist thought, much of it—for obvious reasons—dedicated to understanding the terrible grip that anti-Semitism held on the Continent.<sup>9</sup> In these pages, I want to expand the frame further still, and investigate another line of thinking that extended through this period, one that intersected with these others, but also drew from a different set of traditions and analytical practices. During these decades, a corps of American intellectuals—including, anthropologists Ruth Benedict, Ashley Montagu, Paul Radin, psychologists and social psychologists Hadley Cantril and Gordon Allport, the interdisciplinary John Dollard, historian Jacques Barzun, and anti-racist intellectual Herbert Seligmann—developed a distinct anti-racist discourse

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<sup>8</sup> Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

<sup>9</sup> Richard H King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004).

in a new intellectual idiom, one whose insights, logic, and limits have largely escaped historical examination.

These intellectuals approached the problem of white “race prejudice” from a fundamentally different direction than did Myrdal. Although avowed enemies of Jim Crow, they possessed a broader perspective of America’s many “race problems,” and drew their racial politics from the cultural pluralist rejection of dominant ‘assimilationist’ thinking. Intellectually, their work drew not from the sociological tradition that had long held authority on “race relations” within the American academy, but rather from the rich veins of cultural and psychological thinking they inherited from Franz Boas and Sigmund Freud. Their political touchstone was not the technocratic liberalism that so fascinated Myrdal—at least not entirely—but rather the social democratic, internationalist, anti-fascist liberalism of the Popular Front in the 1930s. More broadly, their philosophical beacon was John Dewey rather than Reinhold Niebuhr; their journalistic trumpeter was radical anti-racist Carey McWilliams rather than staid Walter Lippmann; and their political standard bearer was the progressive Henry Wallace as much as it was FDR. From the confluence of these intersecting cultural, intellectual, and political currents, these intellectuals developed a unique sense of the connections between white “race prejudice” and the political and economic conflicts of the era.

In the pages that follow, I will trace out how this collection of left-liberal anti-racist intellectuals, shaped by the crisis of American modernity in the 1930s and early 1940s, developed their own theory of racism, and a broader critique of race and American democracy. Using the intellectual tools at their disposal, including nascent concepts of ‘culture’ and psychology, they constructed a new framework with which to explain the

beliefs and behaviors of white Americans toward racial others. Their work, I argue, not only created the basic lexicon and conceptual matrix through which Americans came to understand white racial prejudice. It also created a durable new political fiction around which American anti-racist discourse would turn—the image of the white racist, or rather, ‘the racist white psyche.’ This innovation promulgated a historic shift in the primary locus of “the race problem”—a shift from non-white racialized bodies to white racist minds. Their work did not obviate the significance of the former, but rather brought the latter to the fore, and established a new relationship between the two in liberal imagination.

To these intellectuals, “race prejudice” was a moral wrong, damaging to whites and non-whites alike. It was also dangerous to democracy, not only for “embittering” significant portions of the American population, and alienating significant portions of the world from liberal democracy, but also because it fouled the waters of democracy itself. As an ideology, they thought, racism tapped into deep irrational needs and desires in the white psyche, and in doing so, circumvented the cultural and intellectual channels through which democracy operated. “Race prejudice” blinded white Americans from seeing the *real* threats, the real dangers to their way of life, and thus prevented them from holding their government responsible. By blaming ‘Negroes’ or ‘Jews’ or immigrants rather than industrialists or bankers or impersonal social forces as the cause of their problems, they followed demagogues when they needed statesmen—or, even better, liberal technocrats. Answering the pivotal question at the heart of *this* dilemma—why did white people persist, even cling to their prejudices no matter how destructive such

prejudices were *to their own lives*?—became the overriding preoccupation of this group of intellectuals.

In many ways, their answers troubled the postwar spirit of liberal optimism on the prospects of managing racial Progress. Indeed, these intellectuals came to see that white “race prejudice” was built into the structure of American communities, stitched into the patterns of American culture, and woven into fabric of the American personality. Even as they palliated many of their more penetrating insights for public consumption, and reiterated the possibilities of changes, their work revealed just how deeply white supremacy penetrated the white American psyche. By way of psychoanalysis and depth psychology, they came to see that race prejudice did not stem simply from ignorance, negative attitudes, or unreconstructed beliefs about other peoples. Instead, prejudice played a *functional* role in the white psyche. In their rendering, “race prejudice” appeared neither as a ‘dilemma,’ nor as a ‘cultural lag’ held on to as one holds on to quaint traditions, or curious relics from bygone days. Rather, it was the vibrant beating-heart of how Americans felt about their communities, understood their national identity, constructed their personalities, and coped with the emotional challenges of modern life. Their answers, then, filled with surprising insights and tragic blind spots, comprise a crucial chapter of the history of American anti-racism, and continue to inform the meaning of racism in our own time.

This dissertation is a history of the intertwined concepts of “racism” and “race prejudice” in American social and psychological thought, as cast in the image of ‘the racist white psyche.’ My project builds off of, and in some cases underneath, the work of a number of



scholars. Primarily, I am working within an emerging historiography of American anti-racism in thought and activism. The task of this scholarship—the task I have taken up in these pages—is to historicize how intellectuals and activists have defined the problem of racism, to test the limits of their understandings and ascertain the nature of those limits, and to explore the relationship between the definition of the problem of racism and the politics of anti-racism. But, there is an additional dimension to my project, one that interrogates the space between history and historiography. The history I tell here abuts two others scholarly currents, both of which have played formative roles in my thinking: the history of the concept of “race” and the history of “whiteness.” As I hope will become clear, I see these threads—the history of anti-racist thought and the historiographies of racism—as intimately intertwined, and animated by the same essential problem: explaining white racism as a historical phenomenon. The questions that animated these two literatures were the same ones that animated the intellectuals whose story I tell in the pages that follow.

The cornerstone of the contemporary historiography of anti-racism rests atop the work of historians to chronicle the history of the concept of “race” in American intellectual life. This historiography has two main currents. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement, the first, older history addressed the origins and development of “race” as a cultural and intellectual formation born of slavery and the exploitation of African Americans, and its persistence after the demise of slavery. Any account of the history of the “race” concept has to begin Thomas Gossett’s widely-cast *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1963), Winthrop Jordan’s groundbreaking *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1969) and George Fredrickson’s incisive

sequel, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate Over Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971).<sup>10</sup> Although perhaps overly generalized in places, Daryl Michael Scott's encyclopedic *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (1997) has ably carried Jordan's and Fredrickson's histories up to the present.<sup>11</sup> The second historical current charts the development of the idea of "race" in the human sciences. Patterned off of the history of science, the narrative through-line of this historiography charts the 'rise and fall' of the "race" concept in biology, natural history, anthropology, psychology and other cognate fields since the early nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The pivotal figure in this history is the German-Jewish anthropologist Franz Boas, who led the revolt "against race" in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by refashioning the tools of race-science into weapons against the concept of "race" itself.<sup>13</sup> As a number of scholars have shown, the publication of Boas's *Mind of Primitive Man* in 1911—the *ur-text* of scientific anti-racism—did not augur a rapid paradigm shift, but

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1968); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987). See also George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: a short history* (Princeton University Press, 2002). For an interesting reaction to this field, see Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000);

<sup>11</sup> Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (UNC Press Books, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> The literature on the history of the "race" concept in science is exhaustive. See, Elazar Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1996). For "race" in sociology see James B McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1993), and in psychology see Graham Richards, *Race, Racism, and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (London: Routledge, 1997);

<sup>13</sup> On the significance of Boas to this history, see the books listed in previous note, as well as Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 1998); Lee D. Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Duke University Press Books, 2010).

rather touched off a fifty-year long battle, fought along disciplinary fronts across the American academy, and whose final skirmishes have yet to exhaust themselves.<sup>14</sup>

In part, my project charts the intellectual changes that preceded and gave rise to these efforts to historicize concepts of “race,” filling in the gap between this historiography and the history of American anti-racist thought. By shifting the lens taken up by these historians, my project focuses in on the *white image* in the *white mind*, highlighting the efforts of psychologists, social scientists, and intellectuals to draw an image of “the racist white psyche.”<sup>15</sup> As it turned out, my efforts to historicize the invention of “the racist white psyche” dovetailed with this well-established historiography. Winthrop Jordan, for instance, grounded his history of the origins of the “race” concept in a psychological analysis of the intertwined meanings of “blackness” and “whiteness” to sixteenth and seventeenth century Britons and English colonists. One need not dig too deeply to find the roots of Jordan’s thinking: he first encountered the study of “race” as an undergraduate in Harvard’s famous interdisciplinary department of Social Relations, a department founded by, among others, Gordon Allport, whose

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<sup>14</sup> As his title indicates, Degler touches on this. Historians have continued to mine the history of scientific debates over the “race” concept, uncovering, for instance, the persistence of biological notions of “race” in well into the postwar decades, its continuing recurrence in medicine and intelligence testing, and even its revival in the guise of genetic inheritance testing. Michelle Brattain’s account of the debate over the science of racial equality in the immediate post-World War II decade stands as only the most recent such effort. See Michelle Brattain, “Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public,” *The American Historical Review* 112, 5 (December 2007). For a useful broader survey, see John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Nell Irvin Painter’s recent *The History of White People* works in a similar vein to my project. Painter takes the perspective that whiteness, and “white people” are ‘social constructions,’ and traces how intellectuals, scientists, artists, and everyday people constructed themselves and others as white. By contrast, I focus specifically on how *anti-racist* intellectuals construct an image of white people around and through their conceptions of race prejudice. Or, put a different way, I give an account of how and why whiteness came to be seen as a ‘social construction’ in the first place. See, Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

engagement with the psychology of race prejudice I profile in chapter four.<sup>16</sup> The history of the “race” concept always—even if only implicitly—was history of the white psyches that created and believed in such ideas.

The second trend in the historiography of anti-racism that my work both builds upon and interrogates claims a more recent vintage. Beginning with Alexander Saxton’s *Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990) and Theodore Allen’s two-volume *The Invention of the White Race* (1994 and 1997), and developing through Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* (1996), Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of A Different Color* (1998), and David Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness* (1999), scholars have extended the logic of the history of the “race” concept to include the category of “white.” Although not without its fair share of controversy and vociferous detractors, this intellectual turn has provided keen insight into a number of historical quandaries, including the fate of Reconstruction, the recurring failures of radical, working-class, and social democratic movements in the United States, the racial limits of the American welfare state, and the roots of white reaction to the successes of the Civil Rights movement. As Roediger’s choice of title indicates, this line of thinking derived from a pivotal insight drawn from W.E.B Du Bois’s magisterial 1935 *Black Reconstruction*, in which the inimitable dean of black letters posited that white southerners earned “a public and psychological wage” from white supremacy, one that padded their take from the system of racial exploitation, and bought their loyalty to a social order that otherwise oppressed them as well. As the wonderfully acerbic Adolph Reed, Jr. reminds us, there has never been a tradition of

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<sup>16</sup> Sheila Skemp, “In Memoriam: Winthrop D. Jordan,” *Perspectives on History* 45, 5 (May 2007), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0705/0705mem1.cfm>. Besides Jordan, George Fredrickson, Oscar Handlin, and John Higham all deployed psychological and psycho-cultural notions of the type whose origins I trace in this study—projection, rationalization, scapegoating, guilt—to explain the appeal of racial or nativist beliefs to white Americans..

black thought that existed wholly independent of the wider currents of American intellectual life. Picking up on this insight for his joint defense and critique of “whiteness studies,” historian John Munro excavates the roots of Du Bois’s thinking on the psychology of white racism in the rich soil of black anti-racism and radical (Communist) anti-racism.

But, even here, we have to widen the range of our dig. The idea that racial domination provided compensatory psychological benefits to white Americans redounded through the work of many anti-racist social scientists and intellectuals during the 1930s and 1940s, tracing in part to the broader influence of radicalism and psychoanalysis on American social thought, but also to the scrupulous attention such intellectual paid to the place of race prejudice in the white psyche. The origins of these two historiographical trends—the history of the “race” concept and the history of whiteness—date not to the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s and the racial reaction of the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, but rather to the psychologically-infused (or at least tintured), leftist and liberal anti-racism of the 1930s and 1940s. Even for historians, it seems, the past is prologue.

While my project fits alongside scholarship on both the “race” concept and the history of whiteness, it also falls in behind the work of a number of scholars who have started to trace out the history of *anti-racism* as a discrete, variegated intellectual formation. Historians trace the history of modern scientific anti-racism—as opposed to the abolitionist anti-racism of the nineteenth century—to the middle decades of the twentieth century, and particularly to the decades of and following American involvement in the Second World War. Focusing largely on the development of the

concept of “race prejudice,” and the establishment of the “prejudice paradigm” in psychology and the social sciences, this history seeks to locate these basic concepts within the broader institutional and intellectual fields in which they were embedded, and to show how such ideas reflect the interests of a distinct class of knowledge producing experts. Divided between more or less critical accounts of liberal, anti-racist orthodoxy, on the one hand, and efforts to rescue various anti-racist heterodoxies from the dustbin of history, on the other, this scholarship sketches out the ideological and intellectual contests that ultimately redefined “racism” as a social problem—as essentially “Un-American,” as one scholar has put it—in the postwar world.<sup>17</sup>

The first, main line of the history of scientific anti-racism traces the consolidation of an orthodox, liberal anti-racism in the mid-1940s. As a number of scholars have noted, this orthodoxy rested on the universalist assumption of strict biological equality between racial groups, and posited a “theory of the unitary character of prejudice,” as John Higham identified it, one that deemed anti-Semitism and anti-black racism as flowing from the same psychosocial well-spring.<sup>18</sup> Centering on two pivotal events—the publication in 1944 of Myrdal’s *An America Dilemma*, and the Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Brown v. Board*, a decade later—historians have highlighted the alliance between postwar racial liberalism and American social and behavioral science.<sup>19</sup> This alliance was forged through a common anti-racist discourse, one that took shape

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<sup>17</sup> Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), chapter 2, “Racism as Un-American.”

<sup>18</sup> John Higham, *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America* (Atheneum, 1975), 176. See also, Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> David W Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations the Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Walter A Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); John P. Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case Against Segregation* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

dialectically through the linked images of the ‘damaged black psyche’ and the ‘racist white psyche.’ These two political fictions mutually constituted each other in postwar racial discourse. Reversing the polarity of an older dialectic between white and black, in which black inferiority and innate character *caused* white racial prejudice, in this new diptych it was white prejudice that kept African Americans in a subjugated position, thereby inflicting damage on them, or keeping them confined to a ‘pathological’ cul-du-sac of American culture.

A few more recent efforts have broadened the historical canvas beyond these signal achievements. In her wide-ranging and persuasive *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Expertise* (1995), historian Ellen Herman outlines how, building atop its successes during World War I, the American behavioral science establishment positioned itself during the World War II as the arbiter of a number of social problems confronting the nation, and subsequently parlayed its efforts into a broad new authority in the postwar world.<sup>20</sup> And, the central thrust of this campaign, she argues, was their professional authority to speak on the interlocking problems of black “psychological damage” and white “race prejudice.” Taking a page from Herman, as well as other scholars, historian Leah Gordon’s “The Question of Prejudice: Social Science,

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<sup>20</sup> Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology*. See also, John P. Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case Against Segregation* (New York: NYU Press, 2001). Both of these books follow through on a seminal insight first articulated by historian of psychology Franz Samelson—namely that American psychology underwent a paradigm shift in its study of race from the psychological bases of racial difference to ‘studies in prejudice’ between the First and Second World Wars—and expounded upon by historian Graham Richards’s *Race, ‘Racism,’ and Psychology: Toward a Reflexive History*, which offers a sweeping survey of Anglo-American psychology’s engagement with “race.” While Richards points to the intellectually untenable nature of ‘race psychology’ and the growing presence of liberal (largely Jewish) psychologists within the psychological establishment, Herman traces this “thematic reversal” in the behavioral sciences to broader shifts in American political culture. Franz Samelson, “From ‘Race Psychology’ to ‘Studies in Prejudice’: Some Observations on the Thematic Reversal in Social Psychology,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14, 3 (July 1, 1978): 265-278; Graham Richards, *Race, Racism, and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (London: Routledge, 1997). Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*.

Education, and the Struggle to Define ‘The Race Problem’ in Mid-Century America, 1935-1965” gives an excellent account of how “individualistic” conceptions of prejudice, many coming from psychology and sociology, “competed” and won out over “situational” and “structural” explanations of racism in contests for institutional support, research funding, and disciplinary prestige.<sup>21</sup> This individualistic conception of prejudice, Gordon argues, accorded well with the long-standing American faith in educational solutions to social problems.<sup>22</sup> More critical yet, in *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (2001), historian Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn extends this history with her account of the development of a “therapeutic” anti-racism in the 1960s and 1970s, which she excoriates for reinforcing notions of racial grievance and reifying racial identities rendered otherwise defunct by the Civil Rights “revolution.”<sup>23</sup>

The second line of historical inquiry into social scientific anti-racism takes up those intellectuals who remained outside the dominant trend of liberal thinking on “race

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<sup>21</sup> Leah Gordon, *The Question of Prejudice: Social Science, Education, and the Struggle to Define the “Race Problem” in Mid-Century America, 1935-1965* (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008). In a more traditional, but no less insightful grain, intellectual historian Richard H. King’s *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals* offers concise and cogent assessments of the “explanatory approaches to the question of why people become ‘racists’” proffered by a host of leading by European intellectuals—including Myrdal, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Hannah Arendt, and Jean-Paul Sartre. His book has provided vital intellectual context for the wider debates into which the intellectuals I write about were wading. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals*, 305.

<sup>22</sup> In a related grain, historian Michelle Brattain has recently chronicled the postwar efforts of anthropologist Ashley Montagu, whose work on race prejudice I outline in chapter three, to forge a scientific consensus on “race” through his work with the United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO). Challenging the notion that the War settled the basic science of race, Brattain observes that many of the critics of the equalitarian position on racial biology, silenced during the War, reemerged in the postwar years, and prevented Montagu’s more radical conceptions—namely his belief in the inherently cooperation nature of human beings—from inclusion in the scientific consensus. See Michelle Brattain, “Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public,” *The American Historical Review* 112, 5 (December 2007):1386-1413.

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Norton, 2001). That professional ‘sensitivity training,’ of all things, could be pegged as a crucial factor in hardening racial identity—in the 1960s and 1970s—strains credulity.



prejudice.” Written both to recover forgotten intellectual traditions, as well as to critique to the mainstream, psychologically-oriented racial liberalism for its lack of engagement with material or ‘structural’ analyses of racial oppression, this history focuses mainly on radical African American intellectuals and social scientists.<sup>24</sup> In *Confronting the Veil* Jonathan Scott Holloway reprises the intertwined history of the “Howard University circle”—sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, political scientist Ralph Bunche, and economist Abram Harris—and their ill-fated, Depression-Era hope that an interracial alliance of working class Americans portended the end of the “Negro Problem.”<sup>25</sup> Taking stock of the full panoply of black radical thinkers—including Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and E. Franklin Frazier, among many others—Nikhil Pal Singh’s brilliant and challenging examination of the ideological terrain between “race and nation, racism and nationalism,” *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, returns these intellectuals to their place in the great debates that shaped American political culture from the 1930s through the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> Still more recently, Jay Garcia’s “Psychology Comes To Harlem” identifies multiple “psychological anti-racisms” that came to fruition at mid-century, including that of Kenneth Clark, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Also examining Ralph Bunche, as well as psychologist Kenneth Clark and playwright Lorraine Hansberry, Ben Keppel’s *The Work of Democracy* traces what he calls “the cultural politics of race,” the way that African American intellectuals became symbols of racial ‘progress’ in the postwar world even as the sharper insights of their work was ignored. Ben Keppel, *The Work of Democracy: Ralph Bunche, Kenneth B. Clark, Lorraine Hansberry, and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

<sup>27</sup> Jay Garcia, “Psychology Comes to Harlem: Race, Intellectuals, and Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century U.S.” (PhD Dissertation: Yale University, 2003). Garcia also analyzes the nexus between psychological knowledge production about “prejudice” (both its origins in whites and its effects on African Americans) and literary representations of “psychological antiracism” in several Hollywood film produced after the War.

My work engages with this complex and growing scholarship at a number of key points. The intellectuals I write about in the chapters that follow certainly helped to establish much of the liberal orthodoxy on “race prejudice.” Most contributed to Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*, some of them directly, like John Dollard and Ashley Montagu, and others through more indirect channels of influence, like Benedict. Moreover, their work played a fundamental role in reconfiguring the American “race problem” as a problem of white racial prejudice. In short, the intellectuals I write about here played a crucial part in shifting the locus of “race problem” from racialized bodies to white racist minds. And, in doing so, they helped to establish the authority of psychologists, and psychological forms of knowledge to speak on the problem of race prejudice.

At the same time, though, their basic conception of the psychological, social, and political dynamics of racism was dissonant with the vision proffered by **orthodoxy**. Myrdal recast American liberal nationalism as a putatively anti-racist and anti-imperialist ideology by way of three key concepts: the idea that white American’s experienced “race prejudice” as ‘a dilemma,’ or even “an ordeal” that they sought to overcome; the notion that such prejudices, as well as racial differences from which they stemmed, were rooted in atavistic, pre-modern forms of culture and social organization that were withering in the face of capitalist modernization; and, the assumption that (an amorphously defined) “white American culture”—the apotheosis of traditions of “Western Civilization” and the Enlightenment—existed as an independent cultural entity from white supremacy, and

thus could serve as the normative framework for judging both “the Negro,” as well as white “race prejudice.”<sup>28</sup>

Each of these assumptions recapitulated key supports that had long structured American racial discourse, and each proved untenable. More to the point, for the intellectuals whose work I treat here, encountering ‘the racist white psyche’ and analyzing what they found gave the lie to each of these assumptions. Embedded in an intellectual milieu in which ideas about “American culture” and capitalist modernity were themselves subject to fierce conflict, these intellectuals tried to think about racism from beyond the established boundaries of American political culture and academic thought—with varying degrees of success. While many of their ideas about the psychological and cultural dimensions of white racism achieved common sense status in the middle decades of the twentieth century—and remain so down to the present—much of what they thought fell away. By following how these intellectuals constructed ‘an image of the racist white psyche,’ this project, then, also aims to recover this independent line of analysis about “race prejudice.”

At its core, my project is a history of psychological and cultural knowledge production about “race prejudice” and white racism, turning around the creation of an image of ‘the racist white psyche’ in American social thought. Rather than focusing on institutional developments or intra-disciplinary intellectual contests, I have approached the emergence of psychological and cultural conceptions of “race prejudice” discursively, as the outcome of the work of intellectuals to bend and extend and cantilever ideas at their

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<sup>28</sup> Both Singh, *Black Is a Country*, chapter 4 and King, *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals*, chapter 2 have been instrumental to my thinking about Myrdal’s work.

disposal to explain new problems, set against the backdrop of larger social, political, and cultural transformations. This corps of anti-racist intellectuals intended to deploy their ideas not only in the rather courtly contests of the Ivy Tower, but also to confront the menacing foe of popular racism on the open field of battle. To that end, they amassed an arsenal of arguments, metaphors, political fictions, and images to defeat prejudice around the world. In doing so, they created a new psychological and cultural discourse of anti-racism.

**Like Myrdal**, the intellectuals about whom I write in the chapters that follow went in search of ‘the racist white psyche.’ This project advances from their perspective. Namely, as a growing contingent of American intellectuals came to see white “race prejudice” a social problem in the 1930s, they faced a rather stunning deficit: while the social and behavioral sciences had built seemingly limitless capacity for producing knowledge about every aspect of African American life and psychology, as well as that of other non-white racial groups, they possessed little capacity to generate new understandings or explanations of *white racism*. The two disciplines that did address race prejudice—the sociology of ‘race relations’ and the nascent field of attitude psychology—both treated white prejudice as an independent social force, one whose effects could be observed, and gauged by way of “social distance” scales and attitude surveys, but that was not itself an object of inquiry.<sup>29</sup> More broadly, they found themselves caught between, on the one hand, racial determinism, and on the other, the largely unconvincing economic determinism of much of the anti-racist Left. They knew that “race prejudice” was not born of racial difference itself, but they also recognized that

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Steinberg, *Race Relations: A Critique* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Social Sciences, 2007); Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: migration, contact, and exoticism in modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2001); McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem*.

fealty to racial groups and racial animosity could not be explained by way of crude economic determinism.

Struggling to find a path that would lead them to ‘the racist white psyche,’ these anti-racist intellectuals improvised new tools for navigation. Relying on a host of still-novel social science concepts—caste, community, myth, scapegoating, frame of reference, and personality, among others—they devised new ways to thinking about white racism. Trained as psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians—albeit at a moment in which the boundaries between the disciplines were particularly porous—these men and women pioneered new methodological strategies for researching intellectual problems. Still, American social science had never faced a research problem quite like this. Indeed, most professional social scientists were accustomed to studying the problems of *non-white*, minority populations. Now, they faced an altogether different challenge: understanding seemingly ‘modern’ white people *as a problem*. Structured around a specific ‘encounter’ with white racial prejudice, each of the chapters that follow details how an intellectual or a group of intellectuals adapted a particular analytical concept to access the white psyche, and to make sense of what they found.

Taken together, then, these chapters present the history of how “prejudice”—and ‘the racist white psyche’—emerged as a discrete object of social and psychological study.

The path these intellectuals chose to follow en route to the undiscovered country of white racism was inextricably shaped by the historical moment in which they embarked. Writing and thinking in the 1930s and 1940s, these men and women were immersed in broader intellectual reconsiderations of the nature of liberal democracy, the tenor of American social relations, the future of American culture, and the fate of the self

amidst the conditions and crises of capitalist modernity. Thinking against the currents that carried most of their mainstream contemporaries, they saw that race and white racial prejudice were central to these larger debates. Indeed, as I argue here, these wider intellectual conflicts not only stimulated the creation of white racial prejudice as a social problem, but also influenced how that problem was conceptualized. The intellectuals I consider here stitched their analyses of white racial prejudice into wider debates about modernity, the rise of fascism, and the prospects of American democracy. Further, their work was connected to a broader movement to re-imagine America itself. Taking their work as a whole, then, reveals how anti-racist social scientists and psychologists connected race prejudice to contests over power, democracy, and capitalism that animated their era.

Three key developments shaped the emergence of this distinct line of thinking about white racial prejudice during the 1930s and early 1940s. The first of these is visible in the historical contours that defined the collective biography of these intellectuals. Having come of age, intellectually, in the decade after the First World War, the group of intellectuals I write about here experienced a fundamentally different kind of “race problem.” They constituted a community of cosmopolitan intellectuals, leftist in their politics, pluralist in their cultural sensibilities, and international in outlook. Many of these intellectuals were Jewish immigrants to the United States, or the students of émigré intellectuals, and thus part of the broader alliance against racism forged between African Americans and liberal Jews in the middle decades of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Further, as a group, they occupied a distinct social position relative to the main knowledge producing

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<sup>30</sup> The history of this alliance is well told in Cheryl Lynn Greenberg's *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton University Press, 2010). On the work of Jewish anti-racist groups to support the burgeoning Civil Rights movement see Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*.

institutions of American intellectual life: they were minorities, often with radical sympathies, *inside* an intellectual establishment still dominated by conservative, masculine, white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant sentiment. More importantly, though, they witnessed first-hand the world lit a-fire by “race”: the rise of racial nationalism across Europe, both before and after the Great War; the explosions of anti-black racial violence after the war; the immigration restriction movement of the early ‘20s; the development of the eugenics movement; the revival of the Ku Klux Klan across the U.S. on a wave of anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and anti-black hatred; the vogue of “Nordicism” and “Anglo-Saxonism” among the American upper classes; the spread of anti-Semitism, exemplified by the lynching of Leo Frank in 1915.

Rather than exhausting themselves, these conflagrations seemed only to fuel each other through the decade, and appeared contiguous with the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, and Japanese imperialism in the 1930s. It was through witnessing these events that the intellectuals I treat here constructed their essential frame of reference on the problems of race. Many of their predecessors saw the race problem as one of “race contacts,” a problem touched off by the spread of European imperialism and mass human migration around the globe in the late nineteenth century, and exemplified by either the colonial encounter between “savage” and “civilized,” or the interaction of discrete racial groups within the booming industrial American metropolis. By the 1950s, the modal conception of the “race problem” took the shape of “discrimination” and “segregation”—the exclusion of visibly marked groups as a precursor to exploitation or extirpation. Although both of these “problems” appeared to the intellectuals I write about here, the essence of the “race problem” for them resided elsewhere. The problem of race presented

itself predominantly as one of white racist reaction connected to political and social movements that aimed to check the spread of or even subvert democracy. Given a choice between a multi-racial, multi-ethnic democracy and the nurturance of their racial prejudices, white people in Europe and the US in the 1930s seemed drawn to the latter. Understanding why this was so became the paramount concern of these intellectuals. From this perspective, the psychology of race prejudice sutured together these otherwise disparate social and political problems into a broader pattern in need of explanation and remedy.

Second, these intellectuals came to understand and explain race prejudice from a distinct intellectual tradition. Stemming from the wider transformation of American social and psychological thought after the eclipse of Victorian Era determinism and essentialism, the decades that followed the Great War saw an explosion of new ways of thinking about society and social change, group differences and identity, human behavior and individual consciousness. No two figures loomed larger over this new intellectual landscape than Franz Boas and Sigmund Freud. The intellectuals I profile here were the students and intellectual progeny of these two radical humanists, and as such, they took up the charge of developing the “culture” concept and individual psychology into broader explanatory strategies. Drawing from their own work, as well as from the broader field of psycho-cultural analyses that took shape during the 1930s—including the Neo-Freudian turn toward culture in psychoanalysis, and a number of intellectuals from the Frankfurt school orbit, including Erich Fromm and Karl Mannheim (who introduced the concept of ‘ideology’ to American intellectuals in the mid-1930s), and later, Theodor Adorno and



Max Horkheimer—these intellectuals developed a novel framework through which they analyzed white racism.<sup>31</sup>

By focusing attention on the cultural and psychological dimensions of “race prejudice,” this framework provided keen insights into both the origins of white racism as a cultural and intellectual formation, as well as the ‘benefits’ that prejudices bestowed on the individual ‘racist white psyche.’ More importantly, though, it connected white racism to deeper currents of thought that flowed through American intellectual life in the ‘30s and ‘40s. Playing off of the thinking of Erich Fromm, Franz Alexander, Karen Horney, and other Neo-Freudian “dynamic sociologists,” as Alexander called them, this framework analyzed white race prejudice as part of concerns about the prospects for individual autonomy and coherent selfhood under the conditions of modernity.<sup>32</sup> In this guise, the roots of race prejudice appeared, in part, to stem not from primitive group loyalties or tribalism, but rather from alienation. At the same time, this new framework for understanding white race prejudice took shape within and in contrast to a turn toward understanding *America as a culture* in the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Oscillating between New Deal Era jeremiads against American conformity and irrationality, like Robert and Helen Lynd’s

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, the landmark work of this intellectual movement was Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1934). The literature on Benedict and the “culture and personality” is extensive. Useful to me have been Caffrey, *Ruth Benedict Stranger in this Land*; Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); George W. Stocking, *The Ethnographer’s Magic and Essays in the History of Anthropology* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), Lois W. Banner, *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle* (Knopf, 2003); Di Leonardo, *Exotics at Home*; Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999). More recently, see Joanne Meyerowitz, “How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Constructionist Thought,” *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (March 1, 2010): 1057 -1084

<sup>32</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Franz Alexander, *Our age of unreason: a study of the irrational forces in social life* (Lippincott, 1942); H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social thought, 1890-1930* (Knopf, 1958); Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents*.

<sup>33</sup> Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Hegeman, *Patterns for America*.

Middletown studies, and wartime celebrations of the strength of American “national character,” exemplified by Margaret Mead’s *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (1942), the exploration of a distinctly *American* culture provided a crucial backdrop to the study of white race prejudice executed by the intellectuals I treat here. Indeed, the problem of including and yet limiting white racism within the frame of American culture in the 1930s and early 1940s is one of the key tensions I draw out in this project.

Third, the thinking of this group of intellectuals was tied into the broader transformation of American political culture in the wake of the Great Depression and the global crisis of modernity. The Depression augured a dramatic re-imagining of American society, culture, intellectual life, and politics, much of it turning around the idea of democracy. In this period of “renascent liberalism,” as John Dewey called it, cooperation supplanted competition as the dominant American ethos—or at least rose to complement it—and new forms of collective identity replaced the narrow ideal of individualism in the American imaginary.<sup>34</sup> The agent of this rebirth came from the left, from the Popular Front alliance between liberals, socialists and communists, labor and the middle-class, against the rising threat of right-wing reaction—in Europe and at home. Drawing support from the New Deal, but always working to pull it towards greater egalitarianism, the Popular Front emerged during the 1930s as a broad-based effort to reconstruct American politics and culture along social democratic lines. Moreover, picking up many of the threads drawn out by the older movement for cultural pluralism, as well as black radical anti-racist thought, the Popular Front sought to recast who was an American—who, literally, could be represented among the American People. Manifested in Vice President Henry Wallace’s idea of “the People’s Century”—a direct, ideological

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<sup>34</sup> John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: G.P. Putman & Sons, 1935), 56.

attack on *Life* magazine publisher and media tycoon Henry Luce's (neo-) imperialist call for an "American Century" in 1941—this movement aimed for nothing less than multi-racial, egalitarian reconfiguration of American democracy.<sup>35</sup>

For those intellectuals whose sympathies lay with the Popular Front, including most of the characters I write about here, the crisis of modernity called forth a more sophisticated analysis of the economic and political dimensions of white racial prejudice—best described as 'Popular Front anti-racism.'<sup>36</sup> For them, the effort to rebuild American democracy on more social democratic and pluralistic grounds entailed direct confrontation with the myriad causes and consequences of race prejudice. In short, "race prejudice" was not primarily a "minority" problem or even a barrier to assimilation; rather, it was foremost an obstruction to building a democratic body politic, and the re-imagining of who belonged among 'we, the people.' Much as it crystalized a new, pluralistic notion of American national identity, the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939—and America's adoption of the Allied cause after the bombing of Pearl Harbor two years later—added urgency to this effort to understand and defeat race prejudice. But, the demands for national unity also blunted the more radical thrust of the Popular Front, and turned interest in race prejudice away from general democratic reconstruction, and toward concerns about the health of the nation, the problem mass irrationality posed for the state, and the challenges of managing America's social heterogeneity. Always complex and never stable, the politics and ideas of the Popular Front nevertheless pushed

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998); Chris Vials, *Realism for the Masses: Aesthetics, Popular Front Pluralism, and U.S. Culture, 1935-1947* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), especially the introduction; Douglas C. Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), chapter 4; Singh, *Black Is a Country*, chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>36</sup> Vials, *Realism for the Masses*.

issues of racial justice and race prejudice back into the national consciousness at exactly the moment when such issues took on global significance.<sup>37</sup>

Each of these historical currents shifted significantly over the course of the three decades I consider here, and these shifts shaped the development of American anti-racist thought. After the War, fear of the national political consequences of anti-Semitism rapidly receded, and American national self-image was redefined as *already* pluralist and tolerant (at least of ethnic and religious “heritage”). The “Negro Problem” became an all-consuming concern, even as the scope of possible remedies narrowed to controlled desegregation and recognition of formal civil rights. The flexible and experimental character of much of the intellectual work I explore here, in which psychology and culture were mixed with considerations of political power and class dynamics, ossified in the postwar years, and tuned increasingly reductionist. Prejudice, in this regard, became a failure of tolerance rooted in individual psychological formations, traceable to poor childrearing or pathological personalities. These changes were attended by, if not caused by, the defeat and dissolution of the left-liberal alliance that sustained Popular Front anti-racism. Emblemized by the formation of the virulently anti-Communist Americans for Democratic Action in 1947, which played an instrumental role in inserting a civil rights plank into the Democratic Party platform the next year, and Henry Wallace’s humiliating

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<sup>37</sup> Historians Gary Gerstle, Alan Brinkley and Richard Pells, among others, have argued that the Depression crystalized a decade long trend in American liberalism of leaving aside issues of race and culture in favor of a fuller engagement with issues of political and economic democracy. Through his treatment of the connections and divergences of the Popular Front and mainstream liberalism, Doug Rossinow documents how the former drove the latter to pick up racial justice as a concern, and thereby gives us a clearer sense of how the evasions of race issues that Gerstle, Brinkley and Pells discuss eventually give way to postwar racial liberalism. See Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” *The American Historical Review* 99, 4 (October 1, 1994): 1043-1073; Alan Brinkley, *The End Of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage, 1996); Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Urbana-Champaign, Ill., University of Illinois Press, 2004).

defeat as the Progressive candidate for the Presidency in 1948, the triumph of Cold War liberalism marked the end of the wider-ranging anti-racism of the 1930s and early 1940s.

Having brought the vast territory of the white mind into their domain, these intellectuals created a map of American racism. Like pioneer surveyors, they hoped that their map might provide a guide for others, namely the intellectuals and activists who would be tasked with taming this particular wilderness. Reflecting on the discourse that these men and women created, we can see the features—as well as the boundaries—of the terrain they charted. We can also see the fault lines that lay beneath this landscape, the places where the tectonic tensions between plates threatened to destabilize the concepts they had used to map white prejudice. Three such tensions, in particular, structured the discourse they created.

The first of these tensions emerged from their consideration of the normative nature of “race prejudice.” From the outset, this anti-racist discourse was infused with psychological and cultural modes of thought. Indeed, their expertise on the problem of “race prejudice” was fundamentally psychological expertise. As such, they wrote their descriptions and analyses in the idiom of ‘normality,’ ‘abnormality,’ and ‘pathology.’ To these intellectuals, white racial prejudice presented as a social pathology, and ‘the racist white psyche’ suffered from some form of psychological disorder. Taken from both the older, Progressive-Era language of mental hygiene, as well as the newer, psycho-medical lexicon of psychoanalysis, this discourse cast “race prejudice” as a disease, a virus, a contagion. At the same time, through their encounters with “race prejudice,” these intellectuals also came to see that the attitudes and behaviors that marked racism were

*normal*. “Race prejudice” posed a grave danger to the individual and society alike, and yet such prejudices appeared to be a function of normal cultural formations and universal psychological mechanisms.

Closely connected to this problem of normality was the issue of moral responsibility. Clearly, the white racist nurtured vicious hatreds and perpetrated heinous acts in the name of “race.” He or she was an oppressor and lyncher, racial mythmaker and rumor-monger, a supporter of demagogues, an enemy of democracy. But, the anti-racist intellectuals about whom I write were steeped in the political culture of the Great Depression Era. They felt the plight of the Forgotten Man; they wanted to see everyday people as heroes; they knew that the Ma and Pa Joads of the world were victims of predations beyond their control. Building off of this sensibility, they also depicted ‘the racist white psyche’ as a victim of exploitation, of impersonal social forces, and of acute psychological vulnerabilities. As such, these intellectuals grappled with a difficult question: were white racists morally culpable for their hatred of other people, or were they simply subject to larger forces?

The second tension lurking under the newly mapped territory of white racial prejudice related to broader reconsiderations of American modernity.<sup>38</sup> Living in the era of high modernist political and social experiments, these intellectuals struggled to fix the linkages between the forces of modernity and the reality of racism. **Race prejudice and**

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<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Ross’s inimitable study of the effects of modernization and crisis of American exceptionalism on the development of American social thought around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *The Origins of American Social Science* (1991), has been crucial to my thinking about the social and behavioral sciences as sites of American ideological contest.<sup>38</sup> Closer to my own interests, Micaela Di Leonardo’s brilliant and witty examination of the role of race and gender—seen “through the optic of the Dusky Maiden”—in long history of American anthropologists’ engagement with *American* culture, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity* (1998), adds anthropology to Ross’s broader history.<sup>38</sup> Di Leonardo exegesis of the metaphors, narratives, and “invented traditions” that characterized anthropological knowledge production in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and of the conflicted ideological projects that this work served, has been a model of the kind of intellectual history I have aspired to in these pages.

**modernity.** Was “prejudice” a product of the backwardness or incomplete modernization of some white Americans, as Gunnar Myrdal posited, or was it a function of anomie, of alienation produced by the conditions of modern life itself? Was the United States going to solve the problem of ‘prejudice’ by fixing the engines of progress and continuing down the path of modernization, or was the country going to have to heed ‘prejudice’ as a sign that something was inherently wrong with American modernity, and begin to change the nation. By the early 1950s, the answer to these questions was clear: modernization became the balm to nearly every social problem. In the mid-1930s, though, when most of the intellectuals I profile below began to consider white racial prejudice—when the prophets of American modernity had lost their vestments of cultural legitimacy—it was anything but.

Befitting the fact that this is a history of intellectuals as much as a history of ideas, the third tension I trace here stems from how these intellectuals wrote *themselves* into their analyses of white racism. While pitching much of their work toward their respective disciplines, they wrote their interpretations of white racial prejudice for the broader reading public. As such, they cast their ideas in common sense language and made wide use of a number of literary techniques to convey their arguments. They wrote about their encounters with white racism as travelogues; they set their histories of ideas about race within grand historical narratives of the rise and fall of civilization and racial morality plays; they created compelling character typologies to illustrate the dynamics of race prejudice within the white psyche, and they set these characters against each other with dramatic tension. In almost every case, they placed themselves as psychologists, social scientists and intellectuals within these stories. In doing so, they revealed how they

imagined the role of the intellectual at a moment when that role was very much in flux. Further, they tried to establish a clear role in combatting race prejudice for people like them: not only for their fellow intellectuals, but also for the broader social class to which they belonged—the educated, cosmopolitan, politically engaged middle-class, inheritors of early twentieth century Progressivism, and a core constituency in the emerging New Deal order.

As I see it, then, American anti-racist discourse appears not as a dualism, but rather as a triptych—with images of ‘the damaged black psyche’ and ‘the racist white psyche’ flanking a normative image of the tolerant, middle-class liberal. The operative tension in this vein of anti-racist thinking was not between the damaged black psyche’ and ‘the racist white psyche,’ but rather between two images of whiteness: the prejudiced white and the democratic, tolerant, cosmopolitan white. A full treatment of long-range effects of this tension, and of its role in the renegotiation of whiteness and class identity in the postwar years lies beyond the purview of this project (at least in this iteration). Suffice it to say that many of the texts considered in the pages that follow became crucial components in college curricula across a range of disciplines. They became primary instruments by which, quite literally, millions of American college students would learn about “race prejudice” and its effects on African Americans over the course of the two decades that followed World War II. In the process, these students would also learn the proper position of white, middle-class, college educated people on prejudice—namely that having the right stance on prejudice became a crucial marker of both proper democratic citizenship as well as psychological health, and through these, middle-class identity in the postwar world.



The political and intellectual dynamics that shaped these anti-racist intellectuals changed dramatically through the 1930s and 1940s. Over the course of these two decades, building off of each other's work, these anti-racist intellectuals developed an increasingly coherent, morally charged, scientifically based image of 'the racist white psyche' in American social thought. As the chapters that follow sketch out, the same intellectual development that brought this image into clearer focus also attenuated the connections that had linked this political fiction to the broader social, political, and economic roots of white "race prejudice."

Chapter One reexamines John Dollard's classic Depression-era study of Indianola, Mississippi, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937). Historians have treated Dollard's book, variously, as the paradigmatic case study of the short-lived "caste and class" theory of race relations, an important contributor to the litany of black "damage imagery" in American racial discourse, and part of the discovery of the South as an important site of psychological research in the 1930s. While all of these interpretations of Dollard are illuminating, my reading of him takes a different direction. Educated in both sociology and psychoanalysis, Dollard went south to study how social structures and mores impressed themselves on and was internalized by the individual psyche. More specifically, through his portrayal of white southerners, he laid bare how the social structure of white supremacy manifested itself within the southern psyche. In doing so, I argue, he both brought white racism into the purview of mainstream social and behavioral science, as well as created the first durable image of 'the racist white psyche' in American thought. Presaging the journey through the South that Gunnar Myrdal would

take a few years later, Dollard's conception of white southern racial prejudice gives us a glimpse of the kinds of insights that were submerged as the liberal orthodoxy on race took shape in the postwar years. Although he did not share the optimism or the impulse toward reform that drove the other intellectuals about whom I write, he certainly expanded the scope of psychological expertise, and developed a number of key concepts that pointed the compass in the direction that of the others wanted to go.

In chapter one, I argue that part of Dollard's thinking on white racial prejudice stemmed from his tertiary membership in the famed 'culture and personality' circle of American cultural anthropology. Chapter two picks up the work of the pivotal member of that circle, Ruth Benedict. With the publication of her 1940 anti-racist tract, *Race: Science and Politics*, Benedict joined the company of a handful of American intellectuals who set out to redefine the "race" concept in the 1930s by examining it as a *myth*. Although calling particular ideas about racial groups 'myths' had emerged as a fairly common rhetorical tactic by then, for this group of intellectuals—fellow Boasian anthropologist Paul Radin, journalist and civil rights activist Herbert Seligmann, and historian Jacques Barzun—the concept of myth carried a host of specific connotations. From this perspective, all the world's racial belief systems seemed intimately intertwined with each other, and took shape through the same myth-making process. Further, refracted through the cognate concepts like 'ideology' and 'culture'—both of which were new to American intellectuals in the 1930s—the idea that "race" was a myth entailed specific analytical practices. First, thinking of "race" as a myth meant historicizing racial beliefs, connecting them to the broader sweep of the history of Western Civilization, and revealing the role that they played in the political and social conflicts that marred

European and American history. Second, defining “race” as a myth also meant analyzing why such beliefs, all scientific evidence to the contrary, enthralled the minds of so many people. To answer this question, they drew from the same well of psychological thinking that Dollard did, and thereby sketched out their own conception of ‘the racist white psyche.’ Tracing out the history of racial myths, then, lent insight not only into the rise of fascism and present crisis of the West, but also provided a glimpse into ‘the racist white psyche.’ Indeed, in this chapter, I argue that by historicizing racial beliefs using psychology as an analytical lens, Benedict, Radin, Seligman, and Barzun wrote the ‘racist white psyche’ into the history of modern Western Civilization.

Turning in a different direction, chapter three examines the development of the keystone idea in left-liberal anti-racist thinking, the concept of “*scapegoating*.” Similar to the idea of ‘myth,’ “scapegoating” was a commonsense notion that American social and behavioral scientists picked up and invested with new meaning in their efforts to explain white “race prejudice.” Looking at John Dollard’s follow-up to *Caste and Class*, the influential *Frustration and Aggression* (1939), as well as the work of psychoanalytically-informed anthropologist Ashley Montagu and psychologist Hadley Cantril, this chapter traces out how intellectuals recast white “race prejudice” as a form of “scapegoating.” In this guise, the ‘racist white psyche’ was driven by a felt need to vent its frustrations and fears onto racial minority groups. I argue that by linking together the political and social upheaval of the 1930s and 1940s with the psychological needs and desires of the individual, these intellectuals fashioned the “scapegoating” concept into powerful explanatory framework for the world that seemed to be falling apart all around them. Their work marked the increasing standardization of the psychology of race prejudice,

and created a broadly deployable diagnostic category. At the same time, though, the nature of “scapegoating” was subject to sharp intellectual contest. As such, examining the debate over the nature of “scapegoating” provides a clear vantage point from which to see the intellectual and political fault lines that marked left-liberal analyses of racial prejudice—fault lines that would open wide in the coming years.

Lastly, chapter four uses the work of the towering Harvard psychologist and prejudice expert Gordon Allport to explore the re-mapping of ‘the racist white psyche’ by way of the concept of *personality*. Although Allport’s 1954 treatise on *The Nature of Prejudice* stood along with Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* and the jointly-authored *The Authoritarian Personality* as landmarks of postwar, establishment anti-racism, historians have largely ignored Allport’s thinking. In a number of ways, Allport’s work on the “prejudiced personality” represented the culmination of the larger project that animated the intellectuals I present in the first three chapters. Through the concept of personality—a concept that Allport introduced to American academic psychology, but that was also at the center of a broad, interdisciplinary intellectual community of social and behavioral scientists—‘the racist white psyche’ finally came under direct scientific scrutiny. Indeed, through Allport’s work, ‘the racist white psyche’ became an identifiable social type, and a durable political fiction for use in wartime entreaties against racial prejudice. At the same time, though, Allport’s conception of prejudice also shows the evacuation of the more penetrating insights generated by those intellectuals whose basic outlook and political sympathies he shared. Allport possessed a deep commitment to individualism, which served to attenuate the connections between the individual and the wider social and political context. And, guided by a desire to augment American national unity during

the War, Allport downplayed the material and political conflicts that previous intellectuals identified as the roots of racism in favor of impersonal social forces abstracted from direct political or economic interests. As such, his work helped to transform this indigenous, incisive line of critique of American racism into a vision of anti-racism that accorded well with the narrowly legalistic and meliorist Cold War liberalism of the late '40s and '50s.

The search these anti-racist intellectuals undertook to find the roots of white racial prejudice cannot be separated from the overwhelming sense of possibility and change that characterized their historical moment. They were the inheritors of a world possessed by new ideas, and freed from the strictures of essentialist and deterministic ways of thinking that had dominated American intellectual life since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At its core, their work on white “race prejudice” was animated by assumptions that human behavior and difference was essentially plastic. Humans, they believed, were not doomed to live in the world as it was, but possessed the capacity to remake the world—and themselves—afew. These beliefs were inseparable from the spirit of change and hope that infused the age. After all, the possibility of remaking America into a more inclusive democracy, premised on a new birth of freedom—freedom from want and fear, freedom of speech and conscience—seemed within reach in the early 1940s. Likewise, the possibility of a new, anti-imperialist, international system, predicated on the ideals of self-determination and democracy laid out in the Atlantic Charter and embodied in the nascent United Nations, seemed on the verge of realization as the second Great War came to a close.

And yet, their encounters with white racism portended something else. As their charts of the territory of white racism reveal, everywhere they looked, they found marks of its presence. Indeed, through their surveys, they discovered that “race prejudice” pervaded the white psyche, that it scarred the landscape of Western civilization. Here was the darkness at the heart of the American character, marked on the map of American anti-racism as *terra incognita*. Here was the *real* ‘dilemma.’ Culture and psychology were discourses of liberation and possibility, particularly seen against the backdrop of a new political order at home and abroad. But, used to map the ‘the racist white psyche,’ they threatened to lead to the monster that lay beyond the shores of the known world.

**Chapter 1:**  
**“A Psychotic Spot:”**  
**John Dollard and the Psychology of White Racism, 1927-1937**

John Dollard had been down in Mississippi for only a few days, so he was as of yet unadjusted to the demands of southern propriety. Owing perhaps to the heat and humidity of late-summer in the Delta, his strict code of social scientific objectivity loosened just enough to let pass a small morsel of undigested observation. “These white people down here are very charming and really exert themselves to do friendly things once you are accepted,” Dollard observed in his research notebook, “but they seem very much like the psychotics one sometimes meets in a mental hospital.” He continued: “One has exactly the sense of a whole society with a psychotic spot, an irrational, heavily protected sore through which all manner of venomous hatreds and irrational lusts may pour—you are eternally striking against this spot.”<sup>1</sup> The “spot,” of course, was the southern “Negro Problem,” and the “venomous hatreds” would come to be called southern racism. As for the “you”—that he may have intended for himself, his colleagues in the behavioral science community, whose curiosity about the South then seemed insatiable, or perhaps his imagined wider audience, for whom race prejudice had emerged as a newly menacing threat in 1930s.

When Dollard first headed south late in the summer of 1934, he took with him the blessings of his institutional home, Yale’s Institute for Human Relations, the guidance of a number of colleagues who knew something of the region’s peculiar ways, and a host of intellectual tools that promised to lay bare the mysteries of Dixie. Up until then, Dollard

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<sup>1</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949 [1937]), 34.

had been something of a cloistered, insiders' academic, interested mainly in research methodology, synthesizing new modes of analysis, and promoting interdisciplinary research efforts among "human" sciences—psychology, psychiatry, anthropology and sociology. As such, his research trip and extended residence among the people of Indianola, Mississippi, represented a departure, an effort to conduct the kind of hands-on field research that served as intellectual coin among his friends and colleagues at Yale, and in the wider 'culture and personality' circle of intellectuals into which he had fallen. Dollard got his introduction to Indianola from Hortense Powdermaker, a social anthropologist and colleague of his at Yale, who had spent much of the previous two years conducting her own study of Indianola's African American community. And, as had been the case with Powdermaker, and a number of their colleagues and intellectual contemporaries, the South beckoned Dollard in the 1930s because it offered a chance to explore a more raw form of humanity while staying close to home.<sup>2</sup>

Having spent a year in residence at the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis, Dollard had come to believe that, uniquely among the methods of social analysis then in vogue, psychoanalysis was the perfect lever for lifting the heavy façade of southern etiquette and getting a glimpse of how a racial caste society really worked. Recognizing early the inherent anti-essentialism of Freudian thought, the Columbia anthropologist and dedicated anti-racist Franz Boas began teaching Freud as a scientific counterweight to biological theories of racial difference by the mid-1920s.<sup>3</sup> But, even a decade later, psychoanalytic perspectives on the nature of "race relations," "race prejudice" or "racial

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<sup>2</sup> Anne Rose, "Putting the South on the Psychological Map," *Journal of Southern History* 71, 2 (May 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 154.



antipathy” remained underdeveloped, and on the fringes of American social science.

Dollard aimed to move them to the center.

Properly applied, Dollard thought, psychoanalysis could reveal the hidden interior of life in the Delta. How did the social structure of “Southerntown”—Dollard’s fictionalized moniker for the small southern city—mold the emotional lives of its residents? How deep did the emotional roots of white southerners’ “venomous hatreds” extend, and what was the shape of their “psychotic spot”? What kept southern whites steady in their defense of the system, and what prevented black rebellion? What allowed the racial caste to endure against the forces of modernization that eroded so much else of the southern past? And finally, what did living in a caste society feel like to those who hemmed in by its strictures? Full of ambition, Dollard hoped to fashion his answers to these questions into a compelling psychological portrait of everyday life in a typical town of the American South. From the outset, he hoped to create a southern likeness of Helen and Robert Lynd’s famous, and wildly successful, *Middletown* studies—to correct the sleepy, time-forgotten image of the South offered up in the pastoral myths of southern regionalists and dramatized by *Gone with the Wind*.<sup>4</sup>

After five months of fieldwork in Indianola, Dollard described a roiling emotional landscape marked by frustrated impulses, projected fears, displaced aggressions,

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<sup>4</sup> The paradigmatic southern regionalist tract is *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930) by “Twelve Southerners.” See also, Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York : Macmillan, 1936); Robert S. Lynd & Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929) and *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946 [1937]). Positioned as such, Dollard’s book fit neatly between two contemporary studies of the South which analyzed the social structure and patterns of social behavior with far greater depth than Dollard’s psychologically-oriented study: Hortense Powdermaker’s *After Freedom* (1939), a in-depth study of the black community of Indianola, generated out of her two years of living among the black residents of “Cottonville,” as she called it; and *Deep South* (1941), a “caste and class” study of Natchez, Mississippi written up from the research of an interracial team of five anthropologists, conducted over several years.

defensive reactions, and furious outbursts of anger. To learn how it felt to live in a caste society, Dollard immersed himself in the daily goings-on of Southerntown, all the while using his psychoanalytic training to open black and white psyches to heretofore-unexamined depths. He conducted lengthy interviews with a host of Indianola's black residents, and took down their life-histories. Through his psychoanalytical lens, Dollard detected deep damage to the black psyche due to crushed aspirations and caste-engendered fears. Mississippi's racial hierarchy frustrated middle-class black ambitions and stoked ceaseless anxiety. Among lower class blacks, Dollard witnessed "impulse freedom," a spontaneous enjoyment of whatever daily pleasures life afforded them conjoined with a high tolerance for vice and violence within their caste. As to the origins of these traits, Dollard was unequivocal—they were the necessary personality adaptations of a people whose social worlds were radically circumscribed by white caste oppression.

As for Southerntown's white residents, Dollard's fieldwork revealed the pathological ticks lurking just behind the proverbial mask of chivalry, and the unconscious motivations behind the petty bullying that attended even mundane interactions with African Americans. Looking at Southerntown's whites through that same lens, Dollard saw how the caste system warped the white personality every bit as much as it damaged the black psyche. Indeed, his indication that southern whites seemed to him "like the psychotics one sometimes meets in a mental hospital," was as analytically significant as it was indecorous. "The psychotic person," Dollard wrote only a few months before his first sojourn to Indianola, lived in a private version of reality, driven there by some trauma or severe disjuncture between themselves and the wider

culture.<sup>5</sup> Southern whites, Dollard surmised, suffered from a kind of mass psychosis. Moreover, extending to southern culture a designation usually reserved for estimations of African American culture, Dollard noted that ‘the southern way of life’ stood as a pathological derivative of wider American culture. With this basic assumption in hand, Dollard cleared away the rationalizations and myths that obscured southern beliefs and behaviors to reveal a new image in American social thought—an image of ‘the racist white psyche.’

*Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, as Dollard eventually titled the product of his research, became a classic of American social thought from the moment it appeared in 1937. In no small part, it achieved canonical status because it took a fighting role in the ideological struggles over “the race problem” in the 1930s. It put substance behind the “caste and class” interpretation of the American race relations first advanced by Dollard’s friend and informal mentor, Harvard social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner.<sup>6</sup> Since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, racial egalitarians had employed the term “caste” to identify the status of southern African Americans for two basic reasons: in order to avoid the concept of “race,” and the connotations of innate, biological inferiority it carried, and also to establish an implicit moral critique between the American ideal of equality and the reality of the South.

By the 1930s, as the scientific bases of the race concept continued to erode, the appeal of the caste designation only grew. The “race” concept had long explained

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<sup>5</sup> John Dollard, “The Psychotic Person Seen Culturally,” *American Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 5 (March 1, 1934): 637-648.

<sup>6</sup> Warner staked out the basic outlines of his interpretation of southern social structure in two key articles: W. Lloyd Warner, “American Caste and Class,” *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (Sep., 1936): 234-237 and W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis, “A Comparative Study of American Caste,” in *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and Analysis*, Edgar T. Thompson, ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1939), pp. 219-245.

differences groups, the nature of the prevailing social order, and even the implacability of white racial prejudice. Its collapse left a sizeable intellectual void. Warner converted “caste” from an informal description to a theoretical matrix in order to fill this void. He distinguished the social organization of the South from that of the (he thought) class-based structure of the North. Warner thought that southern society was made up of two endogamous racial groups, each with its own relatively fluid class hierarchy, whose interrelations were governed by a slate of rules aimed at maintaining the supremacy of white over black. By employing Warner’s idea of the South as a caste system, then, Dollard was able to slip out from under moribund notions of racial determinism and give a social scientific basis to his moral critique of the South. But, this intellectual maneuver came with a cost, namely that the concept of caste connoted that the social hierarchy was highly resistant to change. Jim Crow, by this measure, would persist against the forces of modernization then sweeping across the Mason-Dixon Line.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, *Caste and Class* revived an age-old characterization of southern blacks along new ideological lines and in the language of the behavioral sciences. As historian Daryl Michael Scott and others have noted, Dollard’s psychoanalytic portrait of southern African Americans—middle-class blacks as anxious, even unstable as a result of being out of their place, and lower-class blacks as essentially happy in their place—fit well within the broader trend of portraying African Americans as psychologically damaged by segregation. If, through the 1910s, the “image of the damaged black

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<sup>7</sup> While lacking an authoritative monograph, the “caste and class” intervention appears in a number of key works on the history of race-thinking and social science. See, James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: A Failure of Perspective* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-century U.S. History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Vernon J. Williams Jr., *From Caste to Minority: Changing Attitudes of American Sociologists Toward Afro-Americans, 1896-1945* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

psyche,” as Scott called it, had served to justify segregation, Dollard’s work in the 1930s reversed the ideological polarity of such damage imagery. Dollard unequivocally attributed the psychological characteristics of southern blacks to the conditions of southern racial oppression, and contrasted the southern caste system to the democratic and egalitarian North. In doing so, he created a link between the critique of southern segregation and the consequences of oppression on the minds of blacks. This connection between segregation and the damaged or underdeveloped psyches of southern African Americans became the foundation of the orthodox liberal anti-racism that emerged over the next two decades.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, and perhaps more significantly still, Dollard put the white southerner at the center of his story, refocusing the American race problem squarely on the “racist white psyche” and the psychological dynamics of white racial prejudice. In *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, Dollard excavated the interior world of white southerners, brought the “common psychology” that bound them together out into the open, and took apart the psychological mechanisms that laid back of their ideas and actions. By bringing Freud to the South, Dollard traced how the peculiar obligations and opportunities of the southern racial caste system constructed the “personality” of the white southerner. He turned the stories that Southerntown’s white residents told him against them, recasting their gentility, hospitality, and elaborate codes of etiquette as a thin veneer for economic exploitation and sexual obsession. Dollard found that southern

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<sup>8</sup> The authority on “damage” imagery is Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1997). See also, Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*, (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1998) chapters 7 and 8; Graham Richards, *Race, Racism and Psychology: Toward a Reflexive History* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Rose, “Putting the South on the Psychological Map.” On the emergence of a liberal orthodoxy of anti-racism see Walter Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1990).

whites were crazed by their race problem, and that he, as a northern, psychoanalytically-attuned social scientist, was uniquely positioned to unmask them. Further, his treatment secured the white southern psyche as the province of psychoanalysts and psychologically-minded intellectuals more generally, creating a novel and novelistic lexicon for understanding the roots and psycho-dynamics of “race prejudice.”

John Dollard’s work from the mid- and late 1930s, especially *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, emerged from the confluence of three interrelated currents in American thought and culture. First, his thinking bears all the marks of the rise and diffusion of psychoanalysis as an intellectual and cultural sensibility in American life that had begun in the late 1910s.<sup>9</sup> As he admitted later in life, Dollard found great personal appeal in the liberatory promise of Freudianism. But, in a broader sense, from his middle-class aspirations and choice of profession, to his reflexive disdain for “biologicistic forms of racism,” Dollard embodied the basic outlook of Freudianism.<sup>10</sup> In essence, Freudianism employed a new idiom of self-description—“unconscious,” “psyche,” “drives,” “conflict,” “complex,” “id,” “ego,” “superego”—to construct a novel conception of “personal experience.”<sup>11</sup> Dollard used this same Freudian language to fashion a new idea of race prejudice: prejudice was not an instinct, but rather a function of the individual personality; “race consciousness” was not a natural outgrowth of group membership, but rather the imprint of a shared pattern of socialization within a given culture. Race prejudice was not driven by the need to protect some ineffable racial “genius,” but rather

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<sup>9</sup> Of particular significance for my thinking on the place of psychoanalysis and of the role it played in Dollard’s work see Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul*, 141-163. See also, Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul*, 141-47.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

stemmed from childhood experiences, personal motivations, and individual pathologies. In short, Dollard used psychoanalysis to create a notion of personal, individual prejudice.

Secondly, as part of an intellectual movement toward synthesizing a unified science of human behavior, Dollard played a key role in infusing psychological modes of analysis into American social thought. Emerging out of decades-old debates on the “group mind” and social instincts, social scientists and psychologists in the 1930s began to converge on the assumption that societies were an aggregate of individuals, and that social problems were aggregated individual problems. This intellectual turn allowed a broad swath of “human” scientists—including Dollard, trained as a sociologist, anthropologists like Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict, psychologists like Abraham Kardiner, and political scientists like Harold Lasswell—to use the new insights of psychology, psychiatry, and of course, psychoanalysis to examine entire societies and whole cultures. This turn toward psychology lent academic knowledge producers an apparent utility that they had long lacked. Plied with confidence that they could positively guide human life, and optimism about elevating the human condition, behavioral scientists launched a “wide-ranging campaign to infuse society with psychological enlightenment.”<sup>12</sup> Personally lacking the sanguinity of his contemporaries—especially on the question of race prejudice—Dollard nonetheless contributed to their larger project of producing knowledge capable of bettering society.

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Herman’s remains the preeminent historical treatment of the rise of the “therapeutic” in American intellectual life and culture.

Last, Dollard's work contributed to the development of scientific anti-racism in American racial discourse.<sup>13</sup> In particular, Dollard's ideas represented a tipping point in the development of a new, anti-essentialist notion of "race prejudice." In the wake of the Great War, and the wave of cataclysmic racial violence that followed it through the early 1920s, existing notions of race prejudice fell into crisis. The idea that white racial prejudice stemmed from interracial ignorance, itself rooted in a universal fear of the unfamiliar—an idea clung to by "race liberals" from John Dewey to W.E.B. Du Bois through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—immolated in the riotous heat of racial animosity touched off in St. Louis, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Tulsa. At the same time, the sense that prejudice was grounded in the will to uphold ancient traditions—the twinned notions of "mores" and "folkways"—began to lose its grip on intellectual respectability. Although it retained popular and scientific purchase well into the 1930s, the quasi-Darwinist theory that race prejudice was driven by an immutable instinct for racial preservation inherited from a time of primitive interracial competition began to collapse under its own convoluted logic, as did the field of instinct psychology as a whole. In this context, American race pundits and intellectuals turned increasingly to psychological concepts to understand the dynamics of race relations, and the irrational nature of race prejudice.

The psychological study of race prejudice that emerged in the 1920s began to replace the deterministic assumptions that had long under girded ideas of instinctive race antipathy. Of course, many academic psychologists picked up the search for immutable

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<sup>13</sup> Briefly, the constituent parts of the scientific anti-racism that emerged in the 1940s are as follows: biological equipotentiality or equality; non-hierarchical and plastic notion of "culture" as matrix of human difference; the social bases of relations between racial groups; and a non-essentialist psychology of race prejudice.



“race traits” from anthropologists, continued to discover innate “racial instincts,” and pioneered the measurement of racial differentials in intelligence all through the 1920s. On whole, however, the opening of this psychological “prejudice paradigm,” as historians have identified it, split the connection between inscribed racial identity and race prejudice, and thereby proved far more congenial to racial egalitarians.<sup>14</sup> At an accelerating pace, new explorations of “social distance” among race relations sociologists, and “stereotypes” and “racial attitudes” among psychologists, began to crowd out the older “race psychology.” Although uneven in its approach to race, psychoanalysis held similar promise in uncovering the roots of race prejudice. Indeed, while still under his teacher’s wing, Carl Jung saw the explanatory utility of psychoanalysis to the American race problem, noting in a letter to Freud that all Americans seemed to have something of a “Negro complex.”<sup>15</sup> Unsurprising, though, Freudian insights into the irrational nature of the racial animosity and conflict found their most sympathetic American audience in the 1920s out on the intellectual frontiers of the American race problem, among those who, like E. Franklin Frazier, Walter White, and W.E.B. Du Bois, were best attuned to challenges to the reigning racial orthodoxy.<sup>16</sup> Due partly to timing and partly to racism, psychoanalytic interpretations of race prejudice remained inchoate and on the fringes of respectability into the 1930s.

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<sup>14</sup> The idea of the emergence of a “prejudice paradigm” in the history of psychology comes from two key sources: Franz Samelson, “From ‘Race Psychology’ to ‘Studies in Prejudice’: Some Observations on the Thematic Reversal in Social Psychology,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14 (July 1978); Graham Richards, *Race, Racism, and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (London New York: Routledge, 1997)

<sup>15</sup> Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, “The Pathology of Race Prejudice,” *The Forum*, 1927; Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1929); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920); W.E.B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn: an Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York:1940; Schocken Books, 1968)

Dollard's journey to the South, and his search of 'the racist white psyche,' marked the beginning of an effort to find new, scientifically-grounded, anti-racist paths to understanding the psychology of white racism. In this, his work shaped a wider generation of anti-racist intellectuals who turned to culture and psychology to analyze and describe the American "race problem," and whose efforts I document in the chapters the follow. Although he was among the first of this collection of intellectuals, Dollard, ever the contrarian, also kept his distance from them in important ways. For instance, he lacked the broader political commitments to social, political, and economic transformation that also characterized the community of intellectuals of which he was member. And, even as he quarreled with the faith that modernization would lead to 'racial Progress' in the South, he did not question the deeper assumption that modernity—as manifested in the industrial, urban, democratic North—served as the normative anti-racists ideal against which the South could be judged.

By bringing psychoanalysis to the South in the mid-1930s, Dollard moved the psychoanalytic understanding of white racial prejudice from the periphery to the center of American racial discourse. His venture carried larger significance because it was the first fully realized deployment of psychological and psychoanalytic tools against the white southerner. Dollard consciously cast himself in the role of psychoanalyst of the South, and he went in search of the deeper meanings and motivations that worked beneath the layer of conscious intent, and thus beyond the purview of other social scientists. Befitting an analyst, one interested in drawing out what lurked in the recesses of the white southern psyche, Dollard was willing to collect the paranoia, hostility and distrust of his white subjects if necessary. By inserting himself so clearly into the narrative of his text, Dollard

paved the way for a new model of expertise on the race problem. He helped to carve out a distinct role for the psychologist-as-social investigator in identifying and analyzing the psychological problems attendant to white racial prejudice. By virtue of his social position—his academic pedigree, and this rather dense network of contacts in the social and behavioral sciences—Dollard conferred legitimacy on psychoanalytic critiques of prejudice and “the race problem,” legitimacy that other intellectuals, as we will see, put to good use.

John Dollard went to the South to stake out a place for his brand of psychoanalytic social analysis, and he wrote *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* to say something true about the lives lived in the South in the mid-1930s. His work earned him accolades from across the social science establishment, made him a respected voice on a broad variety of social problems, and, not insignificantly for an ambitious working-class, Irish-Catholic kid from Wisconsin, secured him a permanent position at Yale—though not as a professor. Moreover, his work launched a sophisticated new psychology of race prejudice, one that could account the irrationality and persistence of racial animosity while maintaining a place for human reason. The two key elements of Dollard’s work—his clarification of the psycho-social dynamics at play in ‘the racist white psyche,’ and his establishment of the psychologists’ authority over the problem of race prejudice—created a new interpretive framework for understanding the South and the “race problem.” In other words, Dollard embedded the southern “Negro problem” in a new and overlapping set of inquiries about “true” motivations behind white southern animosity toward African Americans, the consequences of harboring “race prejudice” for the white psyche, and the possibilities of changing prejudiced beliefs and behavior. Over the course

of the next decade, Dollard's ideas became common intellectual currency among a broader set of American social and behavioral scientists, who also went in search of 'the racist white psyche.' Their work redrew the southern "Negro Problem"—a problem grounded in the very existence of black former slaves on American soil—as a national problem of white racial prejudice.<sup>17</sup> Dollard's work from the 1930s, in this sense, was the first draft of this new conception of the race problem.

### *The Education of John Dollard*

John Dollard was an accidental intellectual, if ever there was one. When Dollard returned home from serving in the Great War, he moved to the bustling state capital and university town of Madison, to matriculate at the University of Wisconsin.<sup>18</sup> His mother, an educator from an educated family, impressed upon her eldest child an appreciation for learning and for "reaching for higher things." The university accommodated both. Indeed, it was an opportune time to enter the academy. During the 1920s, wealthy private philanthropies began to turn toward social science research as the best avenue toward fulfilling their missions for social betterment, and state and federal agencies increasingly looked to the university-trained middle-class for staff and expert guidance. When the Dollard family patriarch was killed in a railroad accident in 1920, John, then only 20 years old, and only

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<sup>17</sup> Together with the "culture" concept, this idea of "race prejudice" created the intellectual foundations for the new liberal understandings human differences and the interaction between different cultural groups. In essence, "race prejudice" served as the individual and affective complement to the "culture" concept then emerging from anthropology proper into wider sphere of American thought. On Race and the "therapeutic," see the Introduction, above, particularly notes 19-27.

<sup>18</sup> Biographical information for Dollard is sparse despite his long career. The best sources are the two-page obituary written by a long-time intellectual collaborator at Yale, Neal E. Miller, an interview with him conducted by William R. Ferris in 1975, and a transcript from an interview taken in 1972 by James Carey about Chicago sociology in the 1920s. See Neal E. Miller, "Obituary John Dollard (1900-1980)," *American Psychologist* 37, 5 (1980): 587-588; William R. Ferris, "Interview: John Dollard: Caste and Class Revisited," *Southern Cultures* (Summer 2004), and James Carey, "Interview with John Dollard," 14 April 1972, University of Chicago Archives, Department of Sociology Interviews, Box 1, Folder 7, 34 pages. James Carrey's study was eventually published as *Sociology and Public Affairs: The Chicago School* (1975).

mid-way through his undergraduate career, became the “banner-bearer” for his six younger siblings, leading them down his same path of education.<sup>19</sup> Within a few years, that path became something of a “royal route” for John: when the University of Chicago tapped his friend and mentor from Wisconsin, Max Mason, to become its President in 1925, Dollard went along as his personal assistant.

Although founded only three decades earlier, the University of Chicago had emerged as one of the elite institutions of American intellectual life by the time Dollard arrived on campus. As the fortunes Chicago’s plutocrats rose from the foundries, slaughterhouses, and department stores of America’s second industrial revolution, so too rose the fortunes of the city itself, and of its self-appointed intellectual center. On Hyde Park land donated by Marshall Field, and with a founding grant from John D. Rockefeller, the University established itself as the translator between the teeming proletariat of southern black and eastern European migrants, the growing cohort of middle-class professional administrators and social reformers, and wealthy industrial interests. Sitting astride the White City of the 1893 World’s Fair, and bisected by the Midway Plaisance, the University took up the task of making the social landscape and dynamics of the city legible to its better inhabitants. By 1928, Mason had moved on to head the Natural Sciences Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, and encouraged Dollard to follow him. The position required a Ph.D., which was hardly more than a technicality for someone as well versed to academic life as Dollard had become. Dollard

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<sup>19</sup> John’s younger brother, Charles, seemed particularly eager to follow closely John’s path, serving a few years as the assistant dean of men at Wisconsin before coming to the attention of Fredrick Keppel, then President of the rich and prestigious Carnegie Corporation in 1938. Charles served as Keppel’s personal liaison to the landmark study that became Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (1944), and eventually succeeded his mentor as the head of Carnegie in 1948. On the Dollard brothers and Charles career see Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992).

decided that the Department of Sociology offered him the quickest route to a doctorate, and to the world of professional knowledge production beyond the University proper. Dollard's doctorate, earned partly with the work he did under President Mason, would have served quite nicely as an admissions ticket. But, the lure of intellectual life at Chicago proved strong enough to divert John Dollard's path.

A number of intellectual currents ran through the sociology department at Chicago by the time that Dollard began work on his degree. Every graduate student enrolled there in the late 1920s got heavy doses of Yale philosopher and American sociological pioneer William Graham Sumner, the German sociological tradition of Georg Simmel, and the social psychology of the pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead. Of course, the work that made Chicago a center for the study of society came from William I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, and Earnest Burgess, who collectively turned sociology into a science of ethnic and race relations, human migration, and the "ecology" of urban life. But, the department was also critically engaged in a wider debate across the "human sciences" about the "psychology of culture" and the potential of psychoanalysis to yield insights into social life.<sup>20</sup> Anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir, one of the first and most respected students of cultural anthropologist Franz Boas, served as the key instrument of this engagement when he arrived to the still unified department of sociology and anthropology the same year as Dollard. Together with American Freudian psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, political psychologist and general *wunderkind* Harold

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<sup>20</sup> Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, 156.

D. Lasswell, and Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis founder Franz Alexander, Sapir made Chicago a center of psychoanalytic ferment.<sup>21</sup>

More than ethnic or race relations, and certainly more than collecting and collating social statistics, it was psychoanalysis and the social significance of personality development that captured Dollard's imagination. Although he may have been receptive to its therapeutic potential for personal reasons, Dollard was first turned on to psychoanalysis at Chicago by Lasswell, who had taken to analyzing whoever happened to be passing his office.<sup>22</sup> And, through their mutual interest, Dollard established a strong connection with Sapir. After finishing his degree, Dollard won Social Science Research Council fellowship to fund a sojourn to the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute in 1931, where he trained under Freudian disciple Hans Sachs. After returning home in 1932, Dollard continued his studies with Berlin Institute exiles Abram Kardiner and Karen Horney, who landed in New York, in 1930 and 1934, respectively. Dollard's training made him one of the most psychoanalytically literate American social scientists of the time. When Sapir and Sullivan sought out help in 1932 for their new seminar on "The Impact of Culture on Personality," Dollard seemed an obvious choice.

Housed at Yale's interdisciplinary Institute of Human Relations (IHR), the seminar marked a key institutional inauguration of the "Culture and Personality" school in American social thought. As such, it served as the pivot point of a Cambridge-to-New

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<sup>21</sup> On the role of psychoanalysis at Chicago, see William Cowan, et al., eds., *New Perspectives in Language, Culture, and Personality: Proceedings of the Edward Sapir Centenary Conference* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Carey interviews with Dollard and Leonard S. Cottrell. Lasswell shared his interest in class psychology and political behavior with another German émigré intellectual, Erich Fromm. Fromm began a lengthy correspondence with both Lasswell and Dollard upon arriving in the US in 1934. Lasswell and Fromm set out in the late 1920s to uncover why the German middle-classes were susceptible to the anti-Semitism (and anti-Modernism) of the Nazis, what had happened to make them psychologically vulnerable to racist appeals. Of course, it the significance of this question would only grow in the 1940s.

York-axis dedicated to remapping the relationships between the individual and culture.<sup>23</sup> Although the New York pole was planted by Kardiner, responsibility for holding it up fell mainly to the intellectual progeny of Franz Boas, most of whom still called Columbia University home—Ralph Linton, Cora DuBois, Margaret Mead and, of course, Ruth Benedict. Significantly, they were joined by the “neo-Freudian triumvirate” who “Americanized” orthodox Freudianism by looking for the social and cultural roots of personality development—Sullivan, Horney, and another intellectual in flight from Nazism, Erich Fromm.<sup>24</sup> On any given evening, social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner or personality psychologist Gordon Allport would come down from Harvard to Yale or Columbia to join in on the discussions, where they were often joined by Chicago faculty-alumnae Lasswell, who moved to Washington, D.C. in 1938, or Thomas (whose wife Dorothy was a faculty member at the IHR).<sup>25</sup>

In the early 1930s, then, John Dollard found himself in the middle of a corridor alight with thinking about psychoanalysis, culture, and the individual. As an intellectual endeavor, the “culture and personality” movement occupied the center of a broader effort underway in the late-1920s and 1930s to account for human variety and behavior in the breach opened by the demise of hereditary, racial, or organic definitions of human

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<sup>23</sup> Margaret M. Caffrey, *Ruth Benedict: Stranger in This Land* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 214-215. On the significance of the C&P movement in anthropology see Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and its Discontents*, among others.

<sup>24</sup> Don Hausdorff, *Erich Fromm* (New York, Twayne Publishers, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Cowan, et al., eds., *New Perspectives in Language*, 513-4. On the seminar, see Lois Banner, *Intertwined Lives*, p. 379-80. See Friedman, *Identity's Architect*, p 135-6; William C. Manson, *The Psychodynamics of Culture: Abram Kardiner and Neo-Freudian Anthropology* and “Abram Kardiner and the Neo-Freudain Alternative in Culture and Personality,” in George W. Stocking Jr, *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict and Others: Essays on Culture and Personality* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 72-94; Kardiner, *The Individual and His Society*.



motivation and difference.<sup>26</sup> Anthropologists led this intellectual maneuver and, with the publication in 1934 of her landmark and widely acclaimed *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict led the anthropologists. Working from the assumption that culture represented “personality writ large,” Benedict employed close participant-observation, sharpened with psychological insights (largely Gestalt rather than Freudian, though this would change), to identify distinct personality “configurations” characteristic to a given culture. Harold Lasswell, searching for the roots of the efficacy of Nazi propaganda in the late 1920s, turned to psychoanalysis because of its promise to offer “simultaneous insight into the person, personality, and culture” all at once.<sup>27</sup>

Both intellectually and personally, Dollard imbricated himself into this emerging intellectual community. Picking up Sullivan and Sapir’s charge to locate “culture” in the individual psyche, Dollard adopted the life-history method, adapted from Thomas, as his research specialty.<sup>28</sup> He brought to the collection of life-histories a convert’s zeal and a psychoanalyst’s sense of the way that events laid down during childhood—events particular to the individual as well as happenings indicative of the larger cultural milieu—revealed themselves later in life.<sup>29</sup> He codified his methods in *Criteria for the Life History*, his first publication for the IHR, which created a framework for understanding how cultures mold biological organisms into personalities. It was through

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<sup>26</sup> The scholarship on this turn to ‘social constructionist’ modes of analysis in American social thought generally focuses on efforts to theorize on the nature of racial differences and gender. Recently, historian Joanne Meyerowitz has expanded discussion of the ‘culture and personality’ movement to include contemporaneous discussion of sexuality as well. In large part, I aim here is to consider how these intellectual used the same concepts to analyze white race prejudice. See Joanne Meyerowitz, “‘How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Constructionist Thought,” *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (March 1, 2010): 1057 -1084.

<sup>27</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, “The Contribution of Freud’s Insight Interview to the Social Sciences,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 45, 3 (Nov., 1939): 375-390.

<sup>28</sup> On the relationship between Dollard and Sapir see Caffrey, *Ruth Benedict*, p. 239.

<sup>29</sup> John Dollard, *Criteria for the Life History* (New Haven: Institute for Human Relations Press, 1935). On this as his signature see Mead’s letters, published in Caffrey and Francis, ed., *To Cherish the Life of the World*.

his expertise at collecting life-histories that Dollard developed friendships with Mead (who he originally met in winter of 1933, through his dissertation advisor, William Ogburn, who had been one of Mead's professors at Sarah Lawrence) and Benedict, as both anthropologists had a keen interest in his interview techniques, and saw great utility in his life-history methodology for understanding the "psychology of culture."<sup>30</sup> And, on several occasions, they were joined in New York City by Horney and Fromm, who were both taken with the potential for collaboration between "ethnologists and analysts."<sup>31</sup>

By the mid-1930s, Dollard's connections to Chicago, Sapir and the IHR embedded him in a web of overlapping personal and professional networks of the leading social scientists of the day. And, among this group, in-depth, in-person field research served as the common intellectual currency. This imperative came home to Dollard through the intellectual and personal intimacy he developed with Mead, much of it carried on in correspondence bearing postmarks from New Guinea or Melanesia. By then, the anthropologists' ethos had also come home in a broader sense: in all measure of studies, particularly the pair of "Middletown" studies put on by Helen and Robert Lynd, the ethnologists' gaze came to bear on American communities. Dollard was not the adventuresome sort, and he increasingly withdrew to the laboratory after the Second World War. But, at the time, the field-work undertaken by Mead and so many of his other colleagues—especially given that those trips became raw material for generating the theories of 'culture and personality' they all sought—must have stoked his imagination,

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<sup>30</sup> The "psychology of culture" was Sapir term for the object of their mutual interest. Indeed, it was Dollard's persistent encouragement that led Mead and Benedict to undertake their own life-histories. Mead attributed the kernel of what would become her autobiography, *Blackberry Winter*, to that initial effort, and Benedict's life-history, though never published, had become the touchstone of all subsequent biographical portraits of her.

<sup>31</sup> Caffrey, *Ruth Benedict*, 249.

his competitive fires, and his jealous impulses. The expert on how to generate and analyze life histories must have wanted to collect some of his own.

Dollard had played a small role in an ongoing IHR study of the African American community of New Haven in the early 1930s, taking life histories of a few community members, but on its face, his choice of the South as the site for his research endeavor is hard to account for. After all, the overwhelming majority of social scientists and intellectuals who seriously took up some phase of the “Negro Problem” through the 1920s were either black, Southern, descended from an earlier generation of racial egalitarians, or, as was the case with his IHR colleague Hortense Powdermaker, taken up with radical politics in one form or another. Certainly, no one who went through Chicago’s sociology department or had embroiled themselves in the community of Boasian anthropologists could be uninterested in questions of race. But, his choice to take a doctorate at Chicago’s sociology department was driven by convenience and career considerations rather than native interest in the subject. That said, Dollard’s Catholic, “hardscrabble Irish stock”—to which he attributed his antipathy to slavery or servitude in any form—as well as his dedication to interdisciplinary research, also put him on the margins of American academic life. Indeed, despite a vast publication record, he did not receive a professorship until his early 50s. In this way, like most of the intellectuals treated in these pages, Dollard approached the problem of white race prejudice from distinct vantage. His biography aside, by the mid-1930s the main currents of American thought and culture began to turn toward the old Confederacy, pushing Dollard and his contemporaries in a southerly direction.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Research Plan,” The Papers of John Dollard, Box 1. Yale University Archives. Anne C. Rose makes the best work of the limited material Dollard left behind in his papers and elsewhere. See Anne C. Rose,

To Americans in the 1930s, the image of the South as a different kind of place loomed large in the national consciousness. The region had stood out as the national exception since before the Civil War, but the idea of the South as stubborn anti-modern backwater to the larger American experience came into particularly stark relief during the Great Depression, which hit Dixie harder than most areas of the country. To New Deal Democrats, the economic backwardness of the South had become a drag on the whole US economy; political expedience aside (the clout of long-sitting of southern Democrats in Congress), the entire nation depended on the large-scale Federal efforts like the Tennessee Valley Authority to pull the South into the modern age. Further, an outpouring of cultural production during the 1930s—the agrarian manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* (1929), William Faulkner's trilogy on the Sutpen family, and W.J. Cash's *Mind of the South* (1939), to name a few—revivified the image of the South in the national consciousness as a place living in another time. This image was only crystallized when, three years after the publication of her novel by the same name, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* was released to cinematic audiences nationwide in 1939. It seemed that the crisis of modernity found its perfect counterweight in the great heft of southern nostalgia, even while modernity itself was washing much of Dixie's distinctiveness away.

To American social and behavioral scientists, that same distinctiveness made the South an ideal laboratory for exploring the workings of race and culture. Powdermaker had certainly hoped the South would reveal such operations when she went in 1932, becoming the first anthropological “expedition” undertaken on an American community. As historian Anne Rose has deftly chronicled, Powdermaker was only the first of a cadre

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“Putting the South on the Psychological Map: The Impact of Region and Race on the Human Sciences during the 1930s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 71, 2 (May 1, 2005): 321-356.

of northern psychologists, psychiatrists, and anthropologists who went South in the 1930s in search of the mysterious, the different, and the soon-to-disappear. They hoped to find in the vagaries of the southern mind deeper human truths that had long been obscured by the myth of racial differences. “The South,” Rose notes, “promised both abnormality and authenticity to scholars looking for a place to test the development of personality in culture.”<sup>33</sup> Although not without dangers, the South nonetheless became a place to explore humanity in the raw for anyone who might have interest; Dollard had exactly such an interest, and Powdermaker showed him the way.

If Powdermaker served as Dollard’s guide to Indianola proper, it was the Lloyd Warner who gave to him a sense of the town’s basic social structure. Beginning in 1933, Warner launched a series of ambitious studies of social relations in modern American communities, reviving a distinctly American style of social class analysis that had been moribund since Thorstein Veblen.<sup>34</sup> Warner “discovered” that rigid class and sub-class barriers divided communities like Newburyport, Massachusetts—renamed “Yankee City” for the purposes of his study—diverging sharply from the American ideal of classlessness. Each class group, he found, had its own social institutions, groupings, and values—in short, its own culture—that determined how the different classes related to each other, and made mobility between such classes virtually impossible.<sup>35</sup> Warner, as part of this effort, took an interest in psychoanalysis as a means of revealing the how social class structure shaped the individual personality, and how class identity was

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<sup>33</sup> Rose, “Putting the South on the Psychological Map,” 337.

<sup>34</sup>On Warner, see O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, chapters 2 and 3; McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem*, chapter 3 and 4.

<sup>35</sup> The influence of Warner’s work, in no small part, was a function of his skills at navigating the political shoals of the academic, philanthropic, and governmental institutions that dominated the social sciences. He proved adept at getting research money to employ young scholars (it was the Depression, after all), and to conduct large-scale research studies of places like Newburyport, New Haven, Chicago’s South Side (“Bronzville”), Morris, Illinois (“Jonesville”), and of course, Natchez, Mississippi.

transferred between generations. These were exactly the kinds of questions that fell within the purview of the IHR, stoking Dollard's interests in particular, and leading the two men to strike up close friendship.

Aiming for a southern analog to his ongoing examination of Newburyport, Warner sponsored an interracial team of five aspiring anthropology students to study Natchez, Mississippi—"Old Town," and its environs, "Old County." Allison Davis and his wife Elizabeth Stubbs Davis, with help from aspiring anthropologist and radical organizer St. Clair Drake, took responsibility for studying the black caste, while Burleigh Gardner and his wife Mary (who also helped write) set out to study the white caste. What they found in Natchez's community structure, however, forced them to make a major adjustment to Warner's thesis. While social relations among whites and blacks in "Old City" followed class lines as they did in the North, relations between the racial groups operated according to a separate set of social rules. Warner likened this social arrangement to the caste system of the Indian sub-continent, crystallizing a description that had long been used in an inchoate way. In essence, the differences between the caste and class structures boiled down to a categorical prohibition on intermarriage and social mobility across the caste line, and more highly codified relations between the castes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Warner laid out his interpretation in two key articles published in 1936 and 1938. His work posed two direct challenges to the Chicago school paradigm in the mid-1930s: first, American social structure was not, as Robert Park had supposed, a dynamic and fluid one (at least not any longer); and second, contrary to the ideas William I. Thomas, "lower" groups were not "disorganized" by their migration or larger social conditions, but rather had coherent, rewarding, and stable cultures independent of middle-class norms. By proposing his "Caste and Class" model of southern social structure, Warner and his students created a keen controversy in race relations theory. After all, the stakes in such a designation were exceedingly high: by likening the place of African Americans in the South to the lower social orders of India, Warner imputed a level of permanence and stability to southern race relations that pushed the prospects for social assimilation to the distant future. This model stood in direct contrast to the interpretation of blacks as an emerging national minority, as Park put forth in the 1920s, or as a class, as Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier proffered in the mid-1930s, both of which at least offered the possibility that conflict and independent agency by blacks could lead to equality. Although the final product of this research, *Deep South*, was not published until 1941, by then Warner had already staked out the basic outlines of the

But, subtle as it was, at the time Warner's reinterpretation froze the prospects of Southern social change just as the South was undergoing rather significant upheaval.

Dollard's relationships with Powdermaker, Warner, Davis, and Gardner guided his decision of where to research, and to what end to put his work.<sup>37</sup> This was his true gift as an intellectual—Dollard located himself at the confluence of innumerable intellectual trends, and then synthesized them into his own work. As Dollard saw it at the time, the collective research efforts of Powdermaker, Warner, Davis and Gardner had established the basic facts of social life and social structure in Southerntown, and his self-prescribed task was only to add “a psychological perspective and organization of these ‘facts.’”<sup>38</sup> As he admitted years later, “as soon as I got down South, all of the informal teaching from Warner about caste became very pertinent to me.”<sup>39</sup> Using psychoanalysis and his life-history methods, Dollard sought to fill in the structure provided by the anthropologists, “to give a unified picture of the emotional underpinning which vitalizes the social relationships in Southerntown.” Further, Dollard supposed that his work also satisfied the emerging mandate of the IHR to produce useable knowledge; using his conceptions, later researchers would be able to “identify the main emotional forces in Southerntown and effectively understand and predict behavior.”<sup>40</sup> Break new ground on the relationship between Culture and Personality, contribute to a cutting-edge race relations project, and

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southern racial caste system in W. Lloyd Warner, “American Caste and Class,” *American Journal of Sociology* 42, 2 (Sep., 1936): 234-237 and W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis, “A Comparative Study of American Caste,” in *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and Analysis*, Edgar T. Thompson, ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1939), pp. 219-245.

<sup>37</sup> See Ferris, “John Dollard: Caste and Class Revisited,” 10-11. Davis, Gardner, Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (1941).

<sup>38</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 28. Here after cited as *CCST*.

<sup>39</sup> Ferris, “John Dollard: Caste and Class Revisited,” 10.

<sup>40</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 27.

advance the cause of scientific social reform—ambitious indeed.<sup>41</sup> Now all John Dollard had to do was go to the South.

*Exploring the South, Encountering the Southerner*

Dollard cast himself as a psychoanalyst of the South. He did not abandon his sociological training or the ambition to understand the whole of southern society; rather, Dollard fashioned his role as a kind of analytic sociologist, analogous to Zora Neale Hurston's or Ruth Benedict's guise as analytic ethnographers, or Harold Lasswell's analytic political science.<sup>42</sup> But, Dollard's stance toward the South differed from that of the empathetic anthropologist or the detached interpreter of propaganda. He did not anticipate being received as a healer or a therapeutic helper, and as he wrote after his account was published, "I expected to lose my friends... Candid analysis cannot be combined with friendship either in life or in social studies."<sup>43</sup> Fitting the Freudian idea that proper analysis evokes hostility—"resistance" in the psychoanalytic parlance—from the ego, which both seeks relief of its inner conflict and tries to evade the probes of the analyst at the same time, Dollard almost welcomed the hostility that traditionally attended the psychoanalytic relationship. His job was to feel out those points of white southern resistance and find out what lay beneath them.

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<sup>41</sup> Dollard may have titled his book "caste and class," and attributed many of its basic characteristics to Warner. But, "Class" here really functions as did "culture" for his anthropological associates, and his overriding interest in the relationship between environment and personality structure was the preeminent concern of the c & p scholars. As such, its proper context is Sapir, Mead, Benedict, Fromm, and the Culture and Personality circle. *Caste and Class* is thusly the first national character study conducted on Americans, begun almost a decade before Mead's *Keep Your Powder Dry*. Dollard's "prejudice white southerner," then, is the unacknowledged shadowy figure stalking the "democratic personalities" that Margaret Mead, Gordon Allport, and Geoffrey Gorer find in their war-time exploration of American character. On American national character studies, see Herman, *Romance of American Psychology*, chapter 2.

<sup>42</sup> Zaretsky's discussion of Hurston; see Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul*, 155.

<sup>43</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, xi. The preface to the 1949 edition.



That said, Dollard arrived in Southerntown with a different agenda in mind. He was there “to study the personality of Negroes in the South, to get a few life histories, and to learn something of about the manner in which the Negro person grows up.”<sup>44</sup> At its core, Dollard’s life history method used the psychoanalytic interview-insight technique—stripped of both its therapeutic and interrogatory dimensions—to construct detailed accounts of the psychic turning points and social impingements that shaped the development of a single personality. To have the privacy necessary to conduct these lengthy life history interviews with black informants, he established an office in a professional building from which whites and blacks could come and go without suspicion. Dollard eventually secured the cooperation of nine African-American subjects—three women, six men. In exchange for the intensive work, “averaging four hours a week,” Dollard suggested that participants would gain new insights into their own personalities, and that they would be contributing to a scientific endeavor to illuminate “the inner life of the Negro person.” In other words, he was offering them the opportunity to help finally prove that Negroes had the same kind of emotional depth as whites. Supposing that might not be enough, he “managed to get school credit at one of the local Negro colleges as an additional reward” for the teachers among them.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond any fresh insights into Negro personality formation, though, Dollard believed that individual life histories also promised to open a window onto the collective psychological life of the larger community.<sup>46</sup> So long as he supplemented them with first-

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<sup>44</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> There is a deep irony here: Dollard used the life-histories of blacks to figure out the emotional lives of whites; then, he used those same life-histories—themselves remarkable grants of subjective control to the informant to tell their own stories—to confirm older images of the black Sambo, and the insecure middle-class African American as the neurotic “marginal man.”

hand observations, Dollard thought that his interviews allowed him to “visualize the flow of events [sic] in the town,” and that the “dreams and fantasies” his informants shared with him revealed the emotional reactions such events engendered. More to the point, Dollard thought that, because the essential function of any culture was “to pattern its objects characteristically and to leave on every single individual the mark of the mores,” the only place to get a true measure of a given culture—of the “master forms of social and emotional relations in Southerntown”—was in the emotional life of the individual.<sup>47</sup> Further, reflecting a synthesis of ‘culture and personality’ insights and Warner’s social-class analysis, Dollard also assumed that every member of a given community inhabited a “concrete social position”—lower class- black, or middle class-white—and that such social positions created uniform personality traits. In other words, the occupants of the various “social rôles” in a community each developed a “common psychology” that unified them. A thorough examination of the experiences of any occupant provided the best view of the common psychology of the group to which they belonged.<sup>48</sup>

After only a few days in Southerntown, Dollard realized the futility of limiting his study to the common psychology of the town’s African American residents. “Whites and whiteness,” he recognized, formed “an inseparable part of the mental life of the Negro.”<sup>49</sup> Contrary to what he had found during his brief study of the African American community in New Haven—“a cultural island and a somewhat atypical one”—in Southerntown, the “lives of white and Negro people are so dynamically joined and fixed in one system that

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<sup>47</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 27. Indeed, Dollard turned the obvious criticism of his method—the use of individual personalities to draw conclusions about entire groups—on its head by indicating that it was *only* through careful attention to the individual personality that the social scientist might ascertain the true workings of the social structure.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.

<sup>49</sup> His description of the insular nature of the New Haven black community comes from his two-page research memo on his upcoming trip to Mississippi. His sense of the interconnectedness of the lives of whites and Negroes in the South is on *Ibid.*, 1.

neither can be understood without the other.”<sup>50</sup> The caste system “patteren[ed] the affects” of both the white and Negro people of the South, serving as the “mold for love, hatred, jealousy, deference, submissiveness, and fear” for anyone who lived according to its strictures.<sup>51</sup> This insight forced Dollard to expand the scope of his inquiry, and to fully account for the social dynamics across the entire community. If he was going to accurately depict the emotional lives of Southerntown’s Negroes, he was going to have to understand the workings of the white southern mind.

Dollard was not, of course, the first intellectual to use psychoanalysis to understand on the white southern psyche. Freud’s preeminent American translator, A. A. Brill, made a prominent early effort to understand the impulses behind southern white race prejudice. In a widely quoted passage that appeared, among other places, in the NAACP’s *Tenth Annual Report*, the Congressional Judiciary Committee Hearing on Segregation and Lynching, and the *New York Times* in 1919, Brill indicated that the torture attendant to lynchings “shows that it is an act of perversion only found in those suffering from extreme forms of sexual perversion.” Reprising a concern for the psychological well-being of witnesses to the barbarity of lynching, a line of attack that had been perfected by Ida B. Wells two decades earlier, Brill exclaimed that “Lynching is a menace to the community.” He continued: “It allows primitive brutality to assert itself and thus destroys the strongest fabric of civilization. Anyone taking part in or witnessing a lynching cannot remain a civilized person.”<sup>52</sup>

Trenchant though Brill’s comments were, the task of psychoanalytically unpacking white southern motivations for their abuse of African Americas fell to a young

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<sup>50</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted from White, *Rope and Faggot*, 61.

E. Franklin Frazier. Frazier gained fluency with psychoanalysis, and psychological concepts more generally, while studying for a master's degree under Bernard Gleuck and G. Stanley Hall at Clark University. Written after the troubles of the early 1920's, Frazier's essay on "The Pathology of Race Prejudice" developed more fully Jung's earlier insight that whites had a "Negro-complex"—a "system of ideas respecting the Negro" which carried great emotional resonance, but were "dissociated from the normal personality," and thus exempt from normal personality controls. Similar to that found in the insane, this dissociation allowed southern whites to "write and talk about the majesty of law, the sacredness of human rights, and the advantages of democracy" in one moment, and "defend mob violence, disfranchisement, and Jim Crow" in the next. Because this Negro-complex conflicted with the white personality "as a whole," southern whites were forced by psychic need to project this "extremely repugnant system of dissociated ideas" onto Negroes themselves.<sup>53</sup> Although Frazier published his essay in *Forum* in 1927—he had submitted to scholarly journals after he wrote it in 1924, but none would accept it—no one followed up on his line of analysis until Dollard did almost a decade later.<sup>54</sup>

Dollard's realization about the intertwined nature of black and white personality formation forced him to confront directly the psychological barriers that Southerntown's white residents erected against his entreaties. As he learned early on from some of his closer southern acquaintances, "Southerntowners" likely saw any "Yankee" as a labor organizer or other such "outside agitator." Even his identification as a social scientist

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<sup>53</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "The Pathology of Race Prejudice," *The Forum* (1927), 857-9.

<sup>54</sup> For details on the story behind Frazier's essay see his review of *Caste and Class in Christendom* from 1938, as well as Anthony M. Platt, "The Rebellious Teaching Career of E. Franklin Frazier," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 13. (Autumn, 1996), pp. 86-90.

offered no sure protection: white southerners accepted such research only so long as it was “not interested in the economic situation, in social equality for Negroes, or in propaganda.”<sup>55</sup> Further, Southerntown’s white residents constantly dissembled around him, dismissing the reliability of his black informants and questioning Dollard’s ability to understand what life was really like in the town. They warned him that the town’s “Negroes would give me selected information, [and] that, being subtle psychologists, they could read my mind and thus anticipate what I wanted to hear.”<sup>56</sup> Dollard consoled his white informants that he “expected biased information from both whites and Negroes, that the systematic biases of the informant were just what I wanted most to know about,” and that “it was exceedingly hard [sic] to lie successfully in the face of the interviewing technique used here.”<sup>57</sup> As was perhaps intended, Dollard’s assurances did little to quell white anxieties; after all, if he saw through the trickery of his black informants, he could also see through theirs.

Of course, as Dollard learned, white southerners had at least as much anxiety about northern sectional bias—about being ‘misunderstood on the Negro problem’ by northerners—than they did about anything that the town’s blacks might actually say. Much of the suspicion, antagonism, and hostility toward the North that Dollard found in Southerntown flowed not from long-simmering animosities over the Civil War, though these were certainly present, but rather from the arrogance and willful misunderstanding that southern whites felt contemporary northerners maintained against them. Northerners had ideas about white southerners and southern race relations that were either hurtful or just plain wrong: southern liberals, working in their own way for “practical”

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<sup>55</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

improvements, “do not receive credit for their actual good works” from northern journals of opinion; northerners all had a proclivity to “judge the whole group [of Negroes] by the few cultivated people we may happen to know,” rather than taking “the trouble to study the local conditions,” a constant irritant to southerners who actually live among the Negroes; southern plantation owners take care of their sick Negroes, where as any northerner would just let them die.<sup>58</sup> A self-proclaimed “student of the Negro,” a “Yankee,” and a “northern intellectual,” Dollard thought that his very presence “brought sharply forward” these sectional suspicions, and required a deft touch to overcome.<sup>59</sup>

Although they cast themselves as squeezed between contemptuous northern bias and treasonous (if not entirely unexpected) black testimony, Southerntown’s white citizens were not without their own means of defending themselves against his examination, as Dollard discovered. First among these was the derisive use of the term “Yankee” as an epithet to describe the “northern caste-enemy.” Southerners variously defined “Yankees,” regardless of their geographical origins, as those people “who ‘love niggers,’ ... have impractical and theoretical ideas on questions of social equality,” and “have an incurable tendency to meddle with other people’s social arrangements.”<sup>60</sup> Many southerners assured Dollard that most Yankees, “When they come down South and have real experience with the racial problem to replace their book learning,” see the error of their northern ways and come to cast their lot with the white caste.<sup>61</sup> Giving white southerners their psychological due, Dollard noted that they used the term “Yankee” because it had the “psychological effect of making the newcomer feel strange and

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<sup>58</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 43-5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

isolated and on his best behavior in order not to be disliked”—a pressure Dollard often felt acutely.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the utility and omnipresence of these mechanisms of caste enforcement led Dollard to declare that “Southerntown is a veritable *Cheka* in its vigilance on caste matters.”<sup>63</sup> Whether or not Dollard really appreciated the irony of likening southern caste enforcement—always defended as natural, good for both races, sanctioned by God, and under threat from northern do-gooders and Communists alike—to Vladimir Lenin’s counter-revolutionary secret police, those Southerntowners who got the joke surely did not find it funny.

The difficulty of examining the white southern mind came home to Dollard on a hot summer morning, a few weeks after his arrival in Southerntown. With a letter of introduction in hand, Dollard paid a call on Will Percy, “a well-known southern writer,” and a descendant of Indianola’s planter aristocracy. The scion of a great old southern family, and an accomplished man of letters—his memoir, *Lanterns on the Levee*, then a few years from completion, remains a classic piece of southern regional literature—Percy knew the history and rhythms of life in the Delta like few others Dollard encountered. And, Percy spoke Dollard’s language. He had known Harry Stack Sullivan for some years, and through Sullivan, he became a key informant for Hortense Powdermaker.<sup>64</sup> For all that, the two men grated on each other immediately. After hearing Dollard’s plan of study, Percy wasted no time in declaring the enterprise futile, noting that after having “lived among them for years,” he had learned little about “the Negro personality”<sup>65</sup>

Although he had not been long in Southerntown, Dollard had already heard this line from

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<sup>62</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 48.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. Italics added.

<sup>64</sup> On this see Powdermaker, *After Freedom*, and *Stranger and Friend*. See also, Rose, “Putting the South on the Psychological Map.”

<sup>65</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 33.

other concerned southerners, and dismissed the observation without consideration—at which point Percy called the younger man out on his presumptuousness about the southern mind.

The confrontation that ensued, though brief, sparked reflection on the part of Dollard, and ultimately crystallized his approach to the problems of white southern intransigence. “Uncomfortably frank,” but not “in essence discourteous,” Percy claimed that like all northerners who ventured South, Dollard came prepared to believe nothing the elder southerner had to say, and “assumed unconsciously that he [Percy] was blinded by race prejudice, as it is called in the North.”<sup>66</sup> Taken aback by Percy’s “harsh” accusation of sectional bias, Dollard made a hasty—if not in essence discourteous—retreat from Percy’s company. After an initial bout of defensive anger, though, Dollard began to reflect on the extent to which his host might have been right. He acknowledged that his northern perspective had indeed skewed his initial observations of life in Southerntown, and that he did see whites as ineluctably prejudiced.<sup>67</sup> Newly aware of his bias, Dollard “set out to isolate and discount it” rather than wish it away, which ultimately allowed him to adopt “a healthier role and permitted a much more honest interaction with southern white people.”<sup>68</sup> More confident than ever about his methods and qualities as a researcher after his encounter with Percy, Dollard made a promise, if only to himself, to take seriously the testimony of his white informants.

Whatever else Percy might have thought about Dollard’s presence on his porch that morning, the roots of his reaction surely lay in the recognition that the northern social

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<sup>66</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 34.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it was during this reflection that Dollard found the quote about white southerners being like psychotics that opens the chapter.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.



scientist represented a new phase in an on-going contest over the meaning of racism in the US. Since Reconstruction, and by virtue of their personal experience living among southern Negroes, white southerners like Percy had long held authority to define race and race relations, including the paradigmatic “racial” phenomena of the age—racial pogroms disguised as “riots,” on the one hand, and lynching, on the other. But, in the 1930s, the tide had begun to turn, and white southerners were losing their grip on the meaning on race conflict, if not on their capacities for oppression. For his part, Dollard betrayed little awareness of his role in this unfolding drama. He was sure that the psychological structures which under girded the caste system were sufficiently strong to resist changes from the outside—an intellectual blind-spot created by describing the southern social structure as a “caste.”<sup>69</sup> What drove Percy’s hostility toward Dollard—indeed, what all Dollard’s white and black informants sensed but could fully articulate—was that Dollard’s interviews and questions and “casual observations” implicitly challenged the hegemony that white southerners held over the meaning of race in the South.

Dollard’s work was part of a larger intellectual flanking maneuver whereby anti-racist intellectuals, with social and behavioral scientists prominent among them, had begun to make real headway on both disproving theories of racial inferiority and instinctive racial antagonism, as well as offering alternative world views based on some version of human equality. Along the central line of this attack, anti-racist intellectuals deployed psychological concepts against white southerners to undermine their abilities to affect their own self-description. As one sociologist—a white Texan, at that—succinctly surmised, the preponderance of stories and traditions offered up by white southerners

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<sup>69</sup> This was Oliver C. Cox’s insight about the Caste and Class school, voiced in his incisive *Class, Caste and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (1948)

amounted to little more than “rationalizations” bandied about to “secure them in their illusions of rationality, impeccable taste, and moral correctness.”<sup>70</sup> Dollard’s research, then, was less a direct assault on the many canards of southern white supremacist doctrine than a siege effort to weaken the intellectual legitimacy of southerner’s arguments about their way of life, and to degrade the ground from which they could defend their claims on the “Negro Problem.”

White southern hostility to any and all questions about race presented Dollard with his toughest challenge in understanding the white psychological dynamics. Surely, Dollard thought, both races were “protective of their culture;” but, southern whites carried with them the paranoia and hostility of a people who had long considered themselves under siege. Percy’s perspicacity notwithstanding, Dollard deemed most white Southerntowners fundamentally incapable of “acute social perception,” and particularly unreliable witnesses to their own psychological workings. The reasons why were clear enough: in order to avoid the “the problematic, offensive, inconsistent, or hostile facts” of their way of life, and “to conceal the disparity between social justice according to our constitutional ideal and the actual caste treatment of the Negro,” white southerners “barricaded” their psyches behind a wall of “distortions and excuses.”<sup>71</sup> Accommodating to the needs of the caste system, southern whites developed what Dollard called “defensive beliefs” so as to mitigate their psychic burden. Moreover, echoing Culture and Personality insights, Dollard surmised that this functional distortion

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<sup>70</sup> W. O. Brown, “Rationalization of Race Prejudice,” *International Journal of Ethics* 43, 3 (April, 1933): 294.

<sup>71</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 363-6.

worked on both the individual and the collective levels—that the “rationalizations of the individual” were essentially analogous to the “defensive beliefs in a society.”<sup>72</sup>

If direct questioning drew hostility and a fusillade of defensive beliefs, Dollard had to find what he was looking for in less obvious places. To circumvent the obstacles that white southerners put up, Dollard drew up two complementary methods to explore the white southern psyche. The first of these emerged from the material he had close at hand—the life history interviews with his Negro informants. Dollard admitted that, “to present the results [of his research] with technical adequacy,” he would need to get corresponding life histories from white people. But, for reasons of time, and the difficulty of conducting life history interviews with hostile subjects, Dollard made no effort to collect such life histories. Instead, in a remarkable and ironic turn, he noted that “we can anticipate much about these [white] life histories in view of our knowledge of Negroes.”<sup>73</sup> In one quick intellectual maneuver, then, Dollard fulfilled the worst fears of southern whites—he used the stories told to him by black informants to represent the lives of whites. African American legal testimony was utterly meaningless in the South, but their psychological testimony was the best source for which a northern social scientist could hope.

Beyond using the life histories of his black informants, Dollard simply immersed himself in the daily goings-on life of Southerntown, and felt for the emotional responses of the people he encountered. This kind of psychological take on participant-observation, adapted from anthropology, was more than a methodological curiosity. It was vital, Dollard surmised, in order to conduct research among white informants without stoking

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<sup>72</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 366.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

their defensive reactions. To that end, he cultivated less formal informants beyond his interviewees—“fifty or sixty” people with whom he spoke on several occasions, and an additional 150 or so people with whom he chatted more casually.<sup>74</sup> For the purposes of his research, however, the exact number of sources was less important than the fact that he “settled into the life of the community and was variously defined as a boarder, a friend, a buyer of gasoline, a person with hay fever, and so on.”<sup>75</sup> Satisfied that his “presence became less conspicuous and disturbing” with time, Dollard imagined that the town took him for a casual observer, thus enabling him to “enter into the flow of events in Southerntown pretty much as they were naturally set to occur.”<sup>76</sup>

At such a close distance, Dollard thought that his psychoanalytically-sensitized perceptions could pick up the deeper emotional currents of social life in Southerntown. By employing “fleeting empathy... followed by reflection and distance,” Dollard picked up on the “overtones in a social situation,” the “little clues and contradictions in the statements and behavior of others,” and the “jokes made at his expense.”<sup>77</sup> He recognized that “People may not tell him directly what he wants to know, perhaps may not know how to”—or may not want to—“and they certainly will not be able to give him a theory of their culture.”<sup>78</sup> But, he was sure that if he paid careful attention to what “Negro and white people [said] about particular problems, ... in parlors, loafing at the hotel, in automobiles, in business places, and the like,” and also “what they seemed to feel” at different points in those myriad conversations, they would inevitably “illustrate it for

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<sup>74</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

him, act it out, and in the best case be their true selves before his eyes.”<sup>79</sup> Rather than a documentary roving eye, though, seeing all without being seen, Dollard thought of himself as a kind of roving psyche—sensitive to the invisible emotional charges flowing through Indianola that went otherwise unnoticed by people less attuned than he.

Dollard used psychoanalysis as a kind of prism, refracting the stories with which his white informants regaled him to break out the emotional composite of the white southern psyche. In the end, then, Percy’s intuition was right on its merits, but also well short of the mark. Dollard never dismissed white southerners’ observations out of hand. Nor did he use their ideas about blacks and “the Negro Problem” as proof of that they possessed race prejudice. Instead, he used their obvious race prejudice to explore the deeper maladjustments that the caste system forced on the southern white psyche. Rather than taking their observations at face value—observations about the characteristics of the Negro, white beneficence toward them, and white benightedness at the hands of northerners—he used what they told him to sense the emotional currents that flowed just beneath the surface of consciousness. For example, Dollard noted that Southerntown’s whites often described African Americans as “little children.” From his life history interviews with his black informants, Dollard thought that such descriptions did indeed contain a grain of truth regarding the “common psychology” of lower-class blacks, but were wholly unjustified regarding the black middle-class—hardly a new observation in either case, regardless of region. But, more importantly, Dollard intuited that whites “overstressed” their certainty about the childlike nature of blacks, thereby marking such ideas as a psychological defense mechanism.<sup>80</sup> Having found a way to circumvent such

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<sup>79</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 20.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

barriers, and to properly interpret the defensive beliefs so common in the South, Dollard set out to uncover what drove white southern behavior.

### *The Personality of the White Southerner*

Dollard brooked little interested in what white southerners thought or how they acted, both of which he thought were fairly well established. Instead, he sought the reasons *why?* Why did they believe so resolutely in black inferiority? Why did they deny that African Americans had the same “full humanity with all the emotional responses posited for whites?”<sup>81</sup> Why had the southern social system continued to cohere? Why did southern whites struggle to defend the system of racial hierarchy in the face of coming modernization and the democratic mores of the nation? By employing his psychoanalytically honed skills of social analysis, Dollard thought he could peer behind white psychological barricades, catch a glimpse of the psychological underpinnings of southern racial ideology, and thus provide clearer answers to these questions. Dollard aimed to connect the hostility whites held against southern blacks “with the rest of the emotional life of each individual,” and to outline the role it played in the everyday goings-on in the South.<sup>82</sup> In doing so, his analysis created a new ‘grammar of motives’ of southern racism—a new conception of individual, personal prejudice as the source of white southern race behavior, contra group psychology or abstract group attitudes, and beyond simple racial or economic determinism. Befitting an emerging impetus toward fashioning universal principles of human behavior, he focused on the general motives and meanings behind white racial domination, and on the “internal, psychic preconditions”

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<sup>81</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 332.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

for that domination.<sup>83</sup> Although they might share them with others in their community, southern whites were driven by personal motives, and they rationalized their behavior with defensive beliefs that held individual, even idiosyncratic, meaning for each of them. In other words, by bringing psychoanalysis to the South, John Dollard wanted to find the “personality” of the white southerner.

During his five months in Indianola, Dollard came to realize that existing theories about race relations were simply too flat, and too lifeless to explain the intimacies and tensions and tangled histories of blacks and whites in the South. To southern white apologists, what made the system work, indeed what made it necessary, was some combination of either the dangers of Negro inferiority, or the white “racial soul or genius, defending its heritage”—hopelessly obsolete ideas to Dollard in either case.<sup>84</sup> To hear northern race relations experts tell it, the racial order was maintained by more agnostic ideas of “ethnocentrism,” the natural capacity for “in-group” solidarity present among all ethno-racial groups, or the “racial attitudes” held by the dominant group. Similarly, Dollard thought that the tendency among his sociologically-trained contemporaries to attribute the persistence of the social order to “the momentum of culture patterns,” the “inertia” of the “social machine,” or a natural tendency of people to conserve the existing status order obscured the torrent of daily life with empty abstractions.<sup>85</sup> In essence, Dollard’s project was to explain both the behavior of white (and black) southerners, as well as the dynamics of the southern caste system without recourse to concepts of race, or a natural human tendency toward social organization.

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<sup>83</sup> Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul*, 86-7.

<sup>84</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, both quotes.

Dollard thought that any interpretation worthy of the name had to locate the roots of the caste system in the more fertile ground of emotional life and personality formation. The baseline of Dollard's interpretation, following the social psychological theories Freud sketched out in *Civilization and its Discontents*, was the common human passion for, among other things, "dominating other persons and having them behave in a desired manner." Such passions, Dollard thought, were either channeled to alternate ends, or repressed by countervailing cultural patterns.<sup>86</sup> Any substantive analysis of the operations of the racial caste, then, had to account for the particular ways in which the rules of the system permitted, prohibited, or rewarded such basic emotional drives among the people who lived according to its strictures. And, of course, any analysis had to make sense of the private psychic consequences of such a system, including the preponderance of dreams, delusions, and distortions that attended everyday life.

Dollard's account of the common patterns of behavior among southern whites turned on the idea of "common psychology." Again taking his cues from Freud, Dollard thought that individual personalities formed in the confrontation between basic human wants and the rules that governed social life—between the drives of the *id* and the demands of a particular social order. Insofar as the social order structured the experiences and pressed evenly upon the impulses of all of its subjects, the process of socialization molded each personality into a common form. "If I could," Dollard wrote of the ideal outcome of his book, "I would show the reader the situation as it must appear to the eyes of a Negro or white child who is being added to the group and who comes gradually to feel the pressure of the main collective structure on his own emotional life."<sup>87</sup> The "main

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<sup>86</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 175.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



collective structure” in the South, of course, held out divergent demands and imposed different social rules on the various race and class groups that made up the southern society. As it appeared to the eyes of a social scientist, then, southern society produced different white and black personalities, as well as different class-based personalities within the white and black castes. Dollard maintained his interest in the impact of the caste on black personality development, but the core of his analysis went to questions about personality formation among southern whites.

The common psychology of southern whites, Dollard thought, developed from their shared upbringing in the caste system, and thus was a white *caste* consciousness. (Incidentally, Dollard thought that this white caste psychology was the counterpart to the African American caste psychology marked by submission to caste rules and internalized compensations.) As Dollard saw it, the caste social order, in contrast to the more “democratic” culture of the North, allowed white people to give full expression to their baser psychic needs and anti-social psychological impulses, so long as they constrained themselves to African Americans. Born into this system, white southerners were reared to take advantage of these permissive social patterns, and their personalities took shape in relation to what they could extract from a subject population.<sup>88</sup> As a result, “Caste members tend to develop a distinct psychology,” Dollard thought, and this distinct white caste psychology served as the engine that made the caste system work—it provided the glue for white racial solidarity, the animus for acts of racial violence, and the fuel for race prejudice. According to this interpretation, in other words, such solidarity as existed among southern whites stemmed not from some general human instinct to group

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<sup>88</sup> Again, Rose recounts the broader turn toward “personality” as an analytical lens in the social sciences during the 1930s. For most such scholars, it was the ‘black’ personality that generated the greatest interest, as was the case for Dollard. But, uniquely I argue, he chose to take stock of the white personality as well.

cohesion, but from the fact that white people were all born to and occupied the same social position vis-à-vis southern blacks—a position of caste superiority. Rather than the expression of an innate racial soul, then, the race prejudice of white southerners was the emotional dimension of living as a white person in a caste society. Racial violence was not motivated by a species based instinct for racial preservation, but rather by any number of private motivations, based on deep well-springs of emotion, and channeled through socially acceptable and historically contingent means of expression. Insofar as Dollard could ascertain, there was nothing *essentially* racial about southern racism.

Dollard's interpretation of the motivations behind southern white behavior reversed the flow of causation regarding race prejudice. Social theorists ranging from the racial Darwinists of the turn of the century to the Nordic supremacists of the 1920s had long argued that the "genius of the race" or some innate racial instinct determined culture and social structure, with race itself providing the force driving history, social life, and social organization. For all their innovation and willingness to adopt the culture concept for explaining racial difference, the Chicago school theorists left this basic relationship intact, only swapping out the unforgiving notion of racial instincts for the more fungible idea of "attitudes." Indeed, as the next chapter will outline, attacking this notion that the psychology of race prejudice shaped social structures, and even drove historical "Progress," became a major preoccupation of anti-racist intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s. For his part, Dollard argued that the opposite was the case: it was culture and social structure that molded individual psyches, and thereby shaped the expression of race prejudice. By inserting the individual personality into the dynamics of interracial relations, Dollard severed the necessary and determinative connection between biological

racial identity and white behavior. In other words, personality rather than blood drove race prejudice. As a result, by locating the emotional roots of race prejudice in personality formation, Dollard could account for the instinctive and irrational quality of white racial behavior without sacrificing the idea that humans were rational and that prejudice was essentially conditional—and thus potentially amenable.<sup>89</sup>

With a firm sense of white personality formation in hand, Dollard turned to his analysis to the basic operation of the southern social order. Working from the perspective of the individual white psyche—in other words, from “what whites want and will fight for”—Dollard described the racial caste system as series of “gains,” aggressions, and defensive beliefs.<sup>90</sup> The permissive social patterns that marked southern regional culture allowed whites—particularly middle-class white men—to exploit southern Negroes, to extract a series of economic, sexual, and prestige “gains” from them as they saw fit. At the same time, that permissiveness allowed—indeed mandated—whites to develop a host of violent and aggressive social behavior patterns with which to defend their “gains” against southern blacks and others, and thereby to defend the caste system itself. To harmonize between the reality of white caste “gains” and aggressions, on the one hand, and the wider American “democratic theory” of equal opportunity, fair play, and merit, on the other, white southerners deployed a host of “defensive beliefs” and a “defensive ideology” to make their behavior seem “expedient and in line with current ideals.”<sup>91</sup>

The cornerstone of white domination, and thus of white personality formation, was economic. Southerntown’s middle-class white residents dominated the land, the local

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<sup>89</sup> Ironically, Dollard didn’t believe that the conditions of the South were amenable (even as they were changing dramatically), so he remained pessimistic about the possibilities of the necessary psychological change, even as his culturalist and psychological take made the idea of change intellectually possible.

<sup>90</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 99.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

businesses, and the New Deal relief agencies, which they operated to their own financial advantage and to the detriment of both the middle- and lower-class blacks. Boiled down to its essence, white middle-class control of the productive resources was simple: “middle-class whites pick[ed] very little of the cotton.”<sup>92</sup> Dollard succinctly documented the varieties of middle-class economic exploitation of the Negro caste, from the tenant farming system, to employment in domestic service, and even to the expropriation of businesses established by middle-class blacks. Further, he showed how the poverty of the black community was a direct function of white middle-class affluence, and much of his discussion of this “economic gain” served to reinterpret white explanations as thinly veiled “rationalizations” for exploitation. But, he also noted that the very nature of the system of racial caste meant that whites were no more “free” to change the tenor of race relation than were blacks.

Tantamount to the economic gain, white southerners also enjoyed a “sexual gain” at the expense of the black men and women. “In simplest terms, we mean by a ‘sexual gain’ the fact that white men, by virtue of their caste position, have access to two classes of women, those of the white and Negro castes.”<sup>93</sup> Dollard linked this aspect of the caste structure to the “psychology of the split-image,” the concomitant idealization of the pure (sexless) white woman and degradation of the hyper-sexualized black woman among Southerntown’s white middle-class men. Dollard speculated that the caste gain afforded “the luxury of preserving the image of the untouchable white woman”—and the taboo on white woman as sexual objects—“at the same time having available on easy terms the

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<sup>92</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 100.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

Negro woman as a target for the withdrawn effect.”<sup>94</sup> For those men not quite as hung up on virtuous white womanhood, the caste structure provided an escape from the “renunciations” of marital monogamy to the “zone of freedom” that black women came to represent. Nevertheless, there was a growing consensus that, because those white men who gave into Jezebel’s temptations did so lacking alternatives, the arrival in Southerntown of “modern trends”—the loosening of pre-marital sexual prohibitions—was diminishing the frequency of such cross-racial trysts.

As a good Freudian, Dollard was not satisfied with the idea that sex in the South was only about sex. He noted that “Official opinion of Southerntown,” fitting the overall pattern of rationalizations proffered by the middle-class, was that “only lower-class whites, ‘rednecks,’ go to Negro houses for gambling or women.”<sup>95</sup> Such misdirection, though, belied the existence of “hostile and self-affirming motives” among the middle-class men who sought interracial sexual relations. “In addition to [the] wish for release of sexual tension the status motive also counts; access to Negro women is a continued testimony to white mastery and caste superiority.”<sup>96</sup> Dollard did not deny that affection—and even mutual affection—characterized some of the relationships between white men and black women. But, he recognized that in Southerntown even those relations were commonly represented “under the guise of a sadistic utilization of the body of lower-caste women.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, because the protection of womanhood carried with it great psychic significance for both races in a society as patriarchal as the South, such

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<sup>94</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 137-8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

“utilization” had the added advantage of confirming the dominance of white men over black men.<sup>98</sup>

Dollard recognized that the economic and sexual gains satisfied deep-seated psychological needs on their own, but he also discerned a distinctly psychological “prestige gain” at work in the white psyche as well. Stemming from a sense of “self-satisfaction” at being or appearing to be well loved by one’s caste inferiors, “The gain here is very simple,” he wrote. “It consists in the fact that a member of the white caste has an automatic right to demand forms of behavior from Negroes which serve to increase his own self-esteem.” Aiming to explain the emotional significance of white supremacy, Dollard offered that the deference given whites in the South served as “an illumination of the image of the self, an expansive feeling of being something special and valuable.”<sup>99</sup> Paralleling the notion of a “public and psychological wage” of whiteness contemporaneously elucidated by W.E.B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*, Dollard surmised that the purely psychological utility of racial domination had cemented the cross-class, intra-racial alliances that served as the foundation for southern Redemption of the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, Dollard thought that by the 1930s the psychological gain no longer crossed class lines as freely, accruing mainly to the white middle- and upper classes.

While the class divide in the South began to block poor white southerners from the benefits of the prestige gain, Dollard noted how easily it flowed across the lines of regional identity. Because the democratic mores of the North effectively prevented the

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<sup>98</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 144.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992 [1935]), 700.

development of caste personalities, however, northern visitors to the South usually found the material and sexual gains available there psychologically inaccessible, at least until they fully assimilated southern social patterns. Their self-imposed limits on exploiting the gains of the southern caste system, however, did not diminish the “new experience” that the northerner had when “he comes into the South and for the first time enjoys, as he does enjoy, the borrowed prestige of the southern white man.”<sup>101</sup> As one informant told him, such first time visitors often find themselves “drunk with [the] unexpected adulation” southern Negroes showered upon them.<sup>102</sup>

With the idea of the prestige gain, Dollard provided the intellectual infrastructure for understanding the root of race prejudice *beyond the confines of the South*. The core of Dollard’s analysis of the South was the idea that the caste system created white personalities capable of enjoying the fruits thereof. Although Dollard initially grounded the prejudiced personalities of southern whites in the caste social organization particular to the South, he also conceded that the personality traits they exhibited were not exclusive to them. Speaking for his imagined audience, he noted, “we overlook the fact that most of us, in the North as well as South, are members of the white caste, that we do, in practice, define the Negro as something categorically inferior and demand special privileges for ourselves and fellow whites.”<sup>103</sup> Throughout his subsequent analysis, Dollard maintained his initial identification of “the racist white psyche” as a particularly caste and particularly southern phenomenon. But, just as often his observations dissolved the distinction between southern, caste- and northern democratic-personalities under the totalizing solvent of race. In the midst of his description of southern white caste

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<sup>101</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 175

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-5.

psychology, then, Dollard tacitly admitted that the moorings of the “racist white psyche” in southern social structure were far less secure than his analysis maintained.

The similarity of white personalities across the sectional divide pointed to two overlapping, yet cross-cutting conclusions. On the one hand, Dollard’s observations suggested that the North was a caste society as well. The social structure of the North was sufficiently racially stratified, and contained a substantial enough—even if informal—system of punishments and rewards along racial lines to create northern white personalities analogous to their southern counterparts. On the other hand, Dollard’s assessment also implied that the concept of a racial “caste” lacked real analytical substance, and that what he was actually identifying was a “socially constructed” concept of race at the base of white personality formation. Because Dollard was ideologically trapped by the idea that the South was fundamentally different than the industrial and democratic North, these ideas proved irreconcilable. And, as a product of that northern society, he could not see himself as a guarantor of white prestige, even as he was “benefiting” from it. Instead, to cover over the ideological gap in his thinking, Dollard offered up the idea that northerners “borrow” the prestige of southern white men whenever they are in the South, suggesting that they give it back as they return to northern climes.

Regardless of his limitations, by revealing the intertwined psychological and material (as well sexual) benefits of racial domination, Dollard opened up a new line of analysis in American racial discourse. No longer would social and behavioral scientists, or American intellectuals more generally, have to lean on some ineffable instinct for racial group integrity, or an implacable ignorance, or the defense of tradition for its own



sake to account for the persistence or nature of white race prejudice. Paying handsomely to the southern white middle-class, and trickling down to the rest of the white caste, the “gains” served as motivation for maintaining the racial order.<sup>104</sup> More broadly, by fleshing out the complex and interconnected relationships between social and economic domination, cultural formation, and the psychology of the “racist white psyche,” Dollard’s analysis established a sophisticated and portable psycho-cultural model for examining white racial prejudice. But, he also set an exceedingly high bar: he combined existing sociological, anthropological, and historical accounts of the South with his own psychological analyses and participant observation. Following Dollard’s interdisciplinary lead, a number of anti-racist scholars created similarly multifaceted analyses of white racism, including the anthropologist Ashley Montagu and the social psychologist Hadley Cantril, whose work will be examined in chapter three, below. As the demands of wartime mobilization heightened the urgency to address “the race problem” in the late 1930s and early 1940s, though, and conducting this kind of research came to seem like a luxury that anti-racists social and behavioral scientists could not afford, the study of white race prejudice turned toward less labor intensive modes of analysis—with significant intellectual consequences.

Dollard’s analysis of the roots of southern racial violence exemplified the payoff earned through his intensive study of the psychology of white southern racism. Dollard personally felt the extent to which the psychological gains available to whites in the caste

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<sup>104</sup> His insights into the psychological utility and benefits of being white, I think, foreshadow more analytically powerful concepts of racial identity formation that emerge in the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant, as well as the idea of ‘the possessive investment in whiteness’ pioneered by George Lipsitz. See, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s* (Psychology Press, 1994); George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment In Whiteness* (Temple University Press, 1998).

system crossed regional lines, and thus were essentially fungible by their nature. At the same time, though, Dollard knew that responsibility for enforcing of caste rules fell exclusively to southern whites. Northern whites enjoyed black obsequiousness, but did none of the lynching. Consciously working against the “sentimentalized version of southern life and history” so prevalent in the northern imagination in 1930s, Dollard set out to reveal the sources within the white psyche of the hostility, aggression and violence which wracked the South.

Dollard saw that because “Jim Crowing” ran counter to American democratic and egalitarian mores, whites had to develop a series of “caste aggressions,” as Dollard called them, in order to maintain their “supraordinate position.” The true purpose of the caste aggressions was to humiliate southern blacks, and to isolate them from “the community of human sympathy.”<sup>105</sup> But, white personality structure was such that southern whites did not experience their behavior to maintain the caste line as a form of aggression. Indeed, conditioned to easy exploitation and constant deference, they felt that their own “aggressive manifestations” were really mandatory means of self-defense. And, completing the psychological inversion, the southern white psyche experienced the strivings of southern African Americans, which Dollard thought were perfectly in keeping with the broader American cultural pattern, as uncontained and innate black “aggressiveness.”<sup>106</sup> It was only this psychological context which could explain why lynching, that supreme act of white caste aggression, was always couched as a defensive action, why any interest in African Americans on the part of ‘outsiders’ appeared in the

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<sup>105</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 314.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 317. Portending the formation of the notion that all prejudiced had a common psychological root, Dollard thought that this was the source for the same “illusion of aggressiveness” often attributed to European Jews.

southern mind as contiguous with the “Northern aggressions” perpetrated by abolitionists, missionaries, and Republican politicians since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and why segregation felt like a protective measure.

At an even deeper level, Dollard’s psychological reconstruction of the white southern mind promised to explain the true underpinnings of the profound irrationality, hostility, and violence that marked relations between the races in the South. Dollard showed how the southern white personality took shape in a culture that prized aggressive reactions, and was built around maintaining a hostile posture toward otherwise normal efforts at social mobility by southern African Americans. But, as Dollard discovered early on during his research, the “venomous hatreds” of southern whites toward blacks (and incidentally, toward him) well exceeded the threshold needed to maintain southern white privileges. One of Dollard’s contemporaries identified this tendency as “oppressor neuroses”— “aggressive, over-compensative behavior” sparked by “the latently present and easily aroused fear of status loss as a result of *real* or *fancied* aggressions from an inferior group.”<sup>107</sup> Of course, Dollard suggested that southern whites often veered past neurosis on their way toward psychosis when it came to their race problems. Regardless of its severity, the southern race pathology had a series of distinct etiologies, namely a primary fear of retaliation, sharp sexual conflicts, unresolved Oedipal issues, endemic anxieties regarding class status.

To Dollard, the fact that the mere mention of race often elicited spasms of vitriolic hate from many white southerners bespoke something else at work on or in the southern white psyche: fear. Although white fears dated back to the original terror of

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<sup>107</sup> Fred Brown, “A Socio-psychological Analysis of Race Prejudice,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, v. 27, (1932-33), 371.

slave revolts, and were stoked by the dissolution of long cherished caste privileges, the roots of white southern fears of African Americans were planted in an “unconscious expectation of retaliation for the hostile acts” they perpetrated against blacks.<sup>108</sup> Born of the primal lessons that people should expect hatred from those they attack, white southerners developed deep assumptions that all African Americans harbored hostile intent and malicious designs against them. This climate of fear and defensiveness twisted the southern white psyche such that even minor violations of taboos felt like full-fledged attacks against racial privilege. Whites felt forced to foster a “continuous threatening atmosphere” against blacks, ready to retaliate with all the severity that conscience would allow at the slightest suggestion of racial equality.<sup>109</sup> As far as Dollard could ascertain, southern blacks had “renounced aggression and organization” against the caste structure, and seemed “rather well adjusted to the situation.” And yet, indicative of an unconscious fear of retaliation at work, whites had an “unreasonable, often panicky” fear of “the rather helpless Negroes,” a “fright ... disproportionate to the threat.”<sup>110</sup>

Nothing stoked neurotic fears and provoked defensive aggressions among whites as successfully as did southern psycho-sexual dramas, in no small part because they were so intimately wrapped up with white fears of black revolt or retaliation. After all, if the caste system was based fundamentally on the prohibition of interracial marriage and the preservation of matrilineal racial heritage, interracial sex was inherently threatening. And, the central psycho-sexual drama of the South was the rape-lynch complex. To understand the sexual component of the southern race problem, Dollard used lynching as

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<sup>108</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 318.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 317; 381-2 on white delusions of black aggression and the proprietary interest of “race-conscious white men” in all white women.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 318-19.

a keyhole into the white psyche. What Dollard noticed was that his white informants invariably evoked the specter of black male sexual violence to justify any and all lynching, even though careful investigations of actual lynching revealed that “only” about one-sixth of black victims of lynch-law were ever accused of rape.<sup>111</sup> To Dollard, this disparity between belief and fact pointed to the operation of a host of psychological mechanisms in the southern psyche. And, he thought that a close examination of these mechanisms—with a little help from Freud—could illuminate the “until now unexplained and unintelligible” nature of race prejudice.<sup>112</sup>

Dollard was not the first to suggest that the connection between sex and racial violence, or the catalytic effect that sexual fears had on volatile race relations of the South, had roots deep in the southern white psyche. In the “Pathology of Race Prejudice,” Frazier speculated that southern white men were tormented by the conflict between their sexual desires for black women and the codes of southern propriety. When those desires were “no longer socially approved” or rejected by “his conscious personality,” the southern white man projected his “insistent desire upon the Negro,” thereby fueling the “delusion that the Negro is a ravisher.”<sup>113</sup> In his 1927 exposition on lynching, *Rope and Faggot*, future NAACP head Walter White offered a number of causes for the “excitability” of white southerners on the subject of sex, including two drawn directly from Freudian disciples. After connecting the deep, even primitive religiosity of the region to sexual perversity, White cited psychoanalyst A. A. Brill’s contribution to the NAACP’s *Tenth Annual Report* to link those “abnormal sex instincts” to white mob

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<sup>111</sup> See Walter White, *Rope & Faggot*; Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1933). There is evidence to suggest that it was Raper’s book that gave Dollard the idea of using the South as a site for exploring personality formation.

<sup>112</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 324.

<sup>113</sup> Frazier, “The Pathology of Race Prejudice,” 859.

violence. And, appealing to André Siegfried's analysis of "The Colour Problem" in his 1927 *America Comes of Age*, White identified the disparity between the reality of interracial attraction and the myth of interracial repulsion as an additional source of racial tension. To White, because sex formed such a deep reservoir of emotion in the South, and could be so easily drawn on to incite the mass of southern whites to mob action, the charge of black sexual rapaciousness became the default rallying cry for those elite whites intent on defending their economic and political interests against Negro advancement.<sup>114</sup>

Dollard's analysis of sex and the southern white psyche proceeded along similar tracks. Twisted as it was by the mandates and availabilities of the caste system, sex was particularly fraught in the South, not only for African Americans, but for white women and men as well. According to white caste rules, the very idea of consensual sexual relations—or even sexual desire—between white women and black men was literally beyond the scope of conscious imagination. Forbidden though it may have been, Dollard thought, such interracial sexual desire permeated the South. This created a profound paradox for white women and their husbands: while black men could be punished for transgressing this strictest taboo, because interracial sexual desire on the part of white women was banished from consciousness, it could not be acknowledged, much less addressed. Here, then, lurked the unconscious source of southern sexual anxieties. Dollard thought that the fear and shame white women felt for harboring sexual desires for black men—especially when compounded with a sense of rivalry with black women for the attentions of white men—made them vocal cheerleaders, if not out-right instigators,

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<sup>114</sup> Walter White, *Rope and Faggot*, chapt. 4. White's discussion of Brill, 61; his analysis of the social function of lynching, 76.

for anti-black violence.<sup>115</sup> For white men, Dollard supposed that the unconscious hostility generated by their “jealousy and suspicion of [the] unfaithful inclinations” of their wives, mixed with the fear that black men were always looking to retaliate for the ravaging of black women, worked to heighten already rampant jealousy southern white men harbored for the mythical sexual superiority of black men.<sup>116</sup> Driven by a psychic need to maintain the myth of white women’s sexual virtue, and an inability to consciously accept the possibility that white women and black men would be together consensually, white southern men “vented” these psychic tensions and conflicts about sex onto the bodies of black men.

Given that incidences of rape against white women were exceedingly rare, Dollard thought that the “emotional support” for white southerner’s irrational obsession with the possibility thereof had to come from “events far back in the life histories of the white individuals concerned.”<sup>117</sup> Displaying a real sense of intellectual adventure—unencumbered by the fact that he had no such life histories—Dollard suggested that the relationship patterns people learned within the family created the broader patterns according to which they understood social relations in their community. As such, where relations between co-equal citizens appeared filial, because white southerners saw southern blacks as children, they conceived black-white relations as properly parental. Following this logic, Dollard discerned the outline of a familiar concept—the Oedipus complex.<sup>118</sup> Because white women “occupie[d] toward the Negro the same utterly inaccessible rôle that the white mother does to her white son,” Dollard thought that the

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<sup>115</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 333 for the instigating role of white women, and 322-3 for the “impossibility” of sexual attraction.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 437-8.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

idea of sexual relations between black men and white women appeared to southern white mind as “a violation of the incest taboo.”<sup>119</sup> This unique admixture of incest and miscegenation in the white psyche, Dollard thought, offered a bottomless well of hostility and irrationality, and explained the consistent exaggerations of black male rapaciousness. The ferocity of the southern white man flowed from his unresolved antagonism “against his mother-profane male parent,” projected onto the imaginary Negro-defiler.<sup>120</sup> Clearly, those people who emerged “from the Oedipus ordeal as jealous adults will grasp more eagerly at the southern social patterns which permit revenge for a sexual affront; individuals with most doubt about the chastity of in-family women will be most certain of Negro guilt whenever rape charges come up.” But, even the “normal” southern white psyche was compelled to view the possibilities of interracial sex through an Oedipal lens.

Besides fear of retaliation, sexual tensions, and the Oedipal projection, Dollard also located the irrational aggression of southern whites in the emerging class dynamics of Southerntown during the 1930s. Insofar as Dollard could tell, the white caste in Southerntown was internally divided between the upper-, middle-, and lower classes. Southerntown had only small class of aristocratic whites, who were descendents of the landed aristocracy of the antebellum years, and had managed to maintain their social status even as their economic dominance faded. At the other end of the white social register, the town also had a sizeable class of poor whites, who as a rule had been unable to translate their deep roots in the region into anything more than a meager subsistence as agricultural laborers. Wedged between these groups was Southerntown’s middle-class majority, whose social influence had not quite grown to match their numerical superiority

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<sup>119</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 437.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.



among the town's white residents, but whose power was clearly on the rise. And, to Dollard's eye, it was the psychological concerns of this ascendant white middle-class that set the tone for social life and race relations in Southerntown.

Of course, the idea that relations across the color line were deeply inflected by the class divisions among the white community was a common one among racial pundits and race relations experts. Indeed, during the 1930s, examining the class basis of race relations became something of an academic industry.<sup>121</sup> It was a well-worn trope in writings about the South, fictional and non-fictional alike, that congenial relations and even a sense of mutual affection still prevailed between the surviving white aristocracy and the majority of blacks. Similarly, it was widely assumed that relations between poor whites and poor blacks were marked by persistent racial conflict, thought to be a natural function of their competition as tenant farmers and agricultural laborers, and of the intransigent race prejudice of the poor white. As the southern contrarian Gerald W. Johnson wrote in 1932, the economically downtrodden "poor white trash" felt compelled to bolster his waning faith in white supremacy by means of violence against African-Americans.<sup>122</sup> The role of the middle-class in the South, as indicated by liberals like Arthur Raper, whose *The Tragedy of Lynching* (1933) employed rigorous empirical research to link racial violence to cotton prices, was to offer their special brand of enlightened leadership to control the racial outbursts of poor southern whites, to prepare them for modern citizenship, and to ensure the "racial peace."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> See notes of W.O. Brown, "The Role of Poor Whites in the Race Relations in the South," *Social Forces* 19 (Dec., 1940).

<sup>122</sup> Gerald W. Johnson, "Note on Race Prejudice," *North American Review* 233 (March 1932): 228.

<sup>123</sup> Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching*. Of course, there were dissenters on this basic view of the relations between lower-class whites and blacks among social scientists and intellectuals, particularly over whether relations between "poor whites" and Negroes were mired ineluctably in a state of conflict, or were developing a new dynamic. Marxist intellectuals and some Chicago school sociologists argued that, as

Dollard saw the class dynamics of the South from a very different analytical perspective than did southern liberals. In particular, he possessed a new sensitivity to the psychological dimension of social mobility and the anxieties associated with insecure social class status. He had been turned on to the utility of psychoanalysis to social science by Harold Lasswell, whose work on the roots of political extremism and instability in the psychology of personal insecurity in the mid-1930s set the standard for analyzing broad social phenomena in terms of individual personalities.<sup>124</sup> And, stemming from their mutual connections to the Culture and Personality circle in New York, Dollard was deeply familiar with Erich Fromm's still-unpublished Frankfurt School research on the psychological bases of the turn toward Nazism taken by the German bourgeoisie.<sup>125</sup> Employing his sensitivity to class strains, and following the logic laid out in these kinds of analyses, Dollard saw that much of race prejudice on display in the South was a form of displacement, a redirection of the hostilities generated by social class insecurity.

To Dollard, the provenance of the southern middle-class provided the key to understanding the class dimension of southern race prejudice. The bulk of Southerntown's middle-class emerged only recently out of the lower class to take up positions in the professional, managerial, clerical sectors of the local economy, or to run businesses of one sort or another. Although they were "On the march to a higher status

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African-Americans were becoming class-conscious workers, relations between them and poor whites were entering a new phase of potential cooperation. Or from the likes of Park and Reuter, blacks were developing a new race consciousness that was making them into a national minority, with its own internal class structure.

<sup>124</sup> Harold Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930); *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1935). On the significance of Lasswell for establishing the tone and intellectual foundation of therapeutic social analysis see Herman, *Romance of American Psychology*, 24-5.

<sup>125</sup> Dollard and Fromm carried out correspondence, friendly and professional, through the 1930s, largely pertaining to Dollard's reading of the emerging manuscript of what would become *Escape from Freedom*. Papers of Erich Fromm, New York Public Library, Correspondence with John Dollard.

position and, like an army on the march, they are provident, industrious, vigilant, and determined,” Dollard saw more than high moral purpose behind their behavior. This was a group weathering the stresses of modern life, trying desperately to maintain their newly achieved class position, and possessed of “a sense of insecurity which acts as a goad to abstemious behavior and close control of impulses.”<sup>126</sup> Citing Raper, Dollard acknowledged that his middle-class white informants identified the “lower-class whites” as “the main tormentors of the Negro.”<sup>127</sup> But, his middle-class black informants insisted that the real racial antagonism in Southerntown came from the white middle-class ““strainers,”” those people who were “pressing forward and straining to get on in the world.”<sup>128</sup> And, according to those same black informants, the poor whites often sympathized with the town’s blacks over the shared treatment they both received at the hands of the upper classes. Dollard reasoned that middle-class white southerners, in addition to holding “poor whites” in contempt, flashed “vigorous hostile attitudes toward the Negroes” because they felt compelled to sharpen “the differences between themselves and the lower-class whites and Negroes”—compelled “because they were none too sure that the differences were very important or permanent.”

In the final few pages of *Caste and Class*, Dollard offered up a distilled version of the psychological principle he thought underlay his observations of middle-class racial hostility. But, foreshadowing a shift in his thinking about race prejudice that he would

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<sup>126</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 76-9

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. Dollard attributed the label “strainers” to his black informants, as euphonious a sociological description ever uttered by a lay person. W. Lloyd Warner, who, according to Alice O’Connor, was deeply interested in the psychological worlds of middle-class and lower-middle class, labeled them “strivers,” a moniker that would show up in later sociological analyses well into the 1950s. O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 62-3. More recently, historian Amy L. Wood reprises this analysis of southern lynching in *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009)

articulate two years later, in his paradigm-setting *Frustration and Aggression*, Dollard dropped the role played by status anxiety, replacing it with the universal human experience of socialization. From our earliest encounters of childhood socialization right through to the resentments and humiliations of everyday adult life, Dollard thought, each person experienced an unending litany of frustrations and irritations. These experiences all fed a deep pool of aggression and hostility within each individual, and rather than “using [such aggression] for constructive alteration of real life conditions, through the war pattern, or by turning it on the self as in neurosis”—though Dollard thought that the latter often did happen the in South—white southerners were “permitted” by society to vent their aggressions against southern African Americans. In this sense, Dollard concluded, race prejudice had only a tenuous connection to its proximate cause—the everyday frustration of modern life.<sup>129</sup>

As chapter three, below, will take up, the idea that southern blacks—and racial minorities in general—served as “scapegoats” for the stresses besetting the white psyche became, over the course of the next decade, tightly interwoven into the fabric of American anti-racist thought. More generally, this line of analysis traced the emotional roots of white racism back to a host of broader economic, social, and political forces buffeting white Americans. The status anxiety or economic insecurity endemic to modern capitalism; the political instability or ineffectualness of modern forms of government; the rate of social change and the destruction of established ways of life—each of these seemed endemic to life in Depression-Era America, and each exacted a high emotional price from everyday Americans. Indeed, each of these endemic to the conditions of modernity. In this sense, the psychology of ‘the racist white psyche’ was not only a

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<sup>129</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 439-44.

psychology of “gains” and “aggressions. It was also a psychology of victimhood, a psychology of reaction against forces and interests that resisted comprehension and defied remedy. As the Depression lingered, and then turned into wartime mobilization—with its own psychic stresses—this approach to the psychology of racism gained greater credibility.

At the same time, Dollard believed that maintaining the caste system itself cost southern whites a heavy psychic toll. And, in line with his larger interpretation, he thought that it was the white middle-class which bore the brunt of this toll. Again ironically, Dollard employed the testimony of a black college student, who had recently attended a conference in the North on “the Negro Problem,” to elucidate the white psyche. His informant noted that southern attendees—certainly middle-class—felt acutely “the force of the disparity between constitutional statements with regard to equality and actual white-caste behavior toward the Negro.” Especially as compared to northerners, who matched their commitment to racial equality with a cold detachment regarding the well-being of blacks, southerners recognized the contradiction “in personal terms.” As a consequence, the informant thought, they were “wrung by this dilemma,” and reacted to it “vigorously.”<sup>130</sup> From Dollard’s perspective, this made perfect sense. After all, they were ultimately responsible for the maintenance of the caste, and the primary beneficiary of its gains. To John Dollard, then, the “American dilemma” was the particular province of the southern middle-class.

Dollard located the root of the southern middle-class’s psychic distress in the endemic conflict between basic psychological principles of social life and their unabated domination of African Americans. Dollard took the first, and more fundamental, of these

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<sup>130</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 365-6.

principles from *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud's seminal effort to create a psychoanalytic social psychology. In Dollard's reading, Freud located the essence of civilization in the human capacity to renounce aggression against other humans, and to turn ordinary resentments to "socially constructive ends."<sup>131</sup> In the South, however, this renunciation was necessarily limited to fellow white people in order to allow for the aggressive defense of the caste system. But, even if the prohibition against violence did not extend to southern blacks, the socialization process still created in whites all the "normal" taboos against directing hatred and hostility toward other people. White southerners, then, lived in a state of constant psychic conflict, feeling that their defense of the southern way of life was both completely justified and completely wrong.

In addition, Dollard thought that white southerners were also "caught in a culture conflict" over their treatment of African Americans. Although the southern caste system contradicted the egalitarian and democratic ideals of the nation—"equal opportunity for mobility, fair play, and reward according to social usefulness and individual sacrifice"—Dollard thought that it was "a great mistake to think that the equalitarian ideal does not function in the South as well as in the North."<sup>132</sup> Indeed, white southerners "cherished and applauded" the American ideal as whole-heartedly as any other Americans. At the same time, however, their regional mores demanded that "the Negro [be kept] socially immobile, disadvantaged in economic, sexual, and prestige spheres, and exposed to extralegal violence on the part of white caste members."<sup>133</sup> The southern white psyche was divided against itself, reaping psychological and material gains from social practices that violated firmly held beliefs.

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<sup>131</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 364.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

In casting southern race relations as an endemic conflict between traditional regional mores and higher national—even universal human—values, Dollard was tapping into a deep current of thought about the problem of race in America. This current found its clearest modern expression in the mid-1940s, when the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal used it as the cornerstone of his magisterial 1944 *American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy*. The *American Dilemma* project was a massive multi-disciplinary compendium of all social science knowledge about African Americans. In his opening chapters, Myrdal fleshed out the idea that the conflict between the “Negro Problem” and the “American Creed” created a moral crisis on the “minds of the white American.” Heavily informed by the social psychological interests of his wife Alva, an intellectual powerhouse in her own right, Myrdal’s idea that white Americans—and particularly white southern Americans—were caught in a moral dilemma became the foundation of post-War American racial liberalism.<sup>134</sup>

In this light, Dollard’s work on the make-up of the white southern psyche was a key precursor to the “American dilemma” thesis. Myrdal leaned on *Caste and Class*, along with White’s *Rope and Faggot* and Frank Tannenbaum’s *Darker Phases of the South*, to explain the “psychopathology of lynching,” and particularly the sexual dimension of white motivation for lynching.<sup>135</sup> But, Myrdal did not note that he echoed Dollard’s broader sense that the disjuncture between white southerners’ behavior and their professed adherence to the American values created a psychic conflict. For Dollard,

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<sup>134</sup> On Myrdal, see Walter A Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations the Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); James B McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>135</sup> Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, Chapter 27 on “Violence and Intimidation.”

forever ambitious, this was a sharp insult. When asked in 1972 about the impact of the Myrdal study on American social science, Dollard let his interviewer know what he made of the Swede's omission: "the son-of-a-bitch didn't cite me."<sup>136</sup> Of course, a great deal separated Dollard's view of the "Negro Problem" in 1937 and Myrdal's in 1944, not the least of which was the former man's suspicion that the racial caste system was resistant to the manipulations of well-meaning social engineers (though his suspicion never quite reached the level of hostility of Robert E. Park, who played the role of the anti-interventionist standard-bearer in Myrdal's morality play of racial liberals triumphing over racial conservatives and nay-saying social scientists).

Dollard's sense of the "American dilemma" had an essential class dimension that Myrdal's lacked. Quite obviously, the oppression of African Americans violated democratic and egalitarian tenets. But, because his definition of America's national ideals was identical to liberal (bourgeois) middle-class ideals—equality of opportunity, freedom to rise according to one's ability, personal mobility—Dollard thought that such violations carried particular significance for the southern middle-class. After all, they had only recently risen out of the lower classes, and now played the decisive role in undermining the ideals that had made their success possible. Further, they subscribed to the social responsibility of the American middle-class to embody these values, and to impart them to other elements in the society. Unlike their northern counterparts, though, who laid claim to the great egalitarian movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the southern middle-class benefited from the violation of the very same ideals they professed to embody. Those middle-class blacks who had managed to rise up in class, and who served as Dollard's informants, played witness to this conundrum. They noted that white middle-class people

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<sup>136</sup> Carey, "Interview with John Dollard."



aggressively resisted their efforts at class mobility, but that, once they arrived in the middle-class, whites began to offer them encouragement, treat them as exemplars, and even proffer small signs of respect for their station.<sup>137</sup>

Additionally, where Myrdal saw moral uneasiness and guilt, Dollard saw something else at work in the white psyche. For him, the psychological distress of the southern white middle-class stemmed not from guilt feelings vis-à-vis “the Negro,” but rather from fears of appearing constitutionally inconsistent or hypocritical. Dollard thought that, deriving from an innate “characteristic of the human self,” people wanted “to show a consistent front toward [their] fellowmen,” and to avoid the appearance of intellectual inconstancy.<sup>138</sup> At their base, such concerns over presenting a unified self-image to the world, and avoiding the appearance of inconsistencies were essentially middle-class. Possessing “the same wishes to be fair as other Americans,” the southern middle-class insisted that, unlike lower-class southerners, their behavior toward the Negro did not flow “out of innate meanness.”<sup>139</sup> In this context, Dollard assumed that “the fellowmen” of the southern middle-class *was not* other white southerners, but rather a class that also strongly valued fairness and disdained such “meanness”—the northern middle-class that Dollard himself embodied.

As Dollard imagined them, the southern middle-class was an aspiring class, one that feared being judged as outside the norms of the larger American middle-class as defined by the North—marked by professional and managerial expertise, and an educated, rational, judicious and even-keeled personality capable of meeting its obligations to society and to itself. By dint of their active role in the caste system, though,

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<sup>137</sup> Dollard, *CCST*, 91-93.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

the southern middle-class cast doubt on their possession of exactly those personality traits—doubt recognized by their northern counterparts, and by themselves. If they were driven to change anything by their conflicted psyches, then, middle-class white southerners sought to escape inconsistency, and to present a unified self-image to the world, not to escape the guilt feelings at oppressing Negroes against the tenants of American equality. Dollard's insight here cut straight to the heart of the ethos of liberal anti-racism, namely that the need to alleviate the psychic burden of prejudice might be used to diminish the oppression of African Americans. In his rendering, the primary motivation that guilt feelings stoked in southern whites was shake off the appearance of prejudice, not necessarily to grant co-equal status to African Americans.<sup>140</sup>

When *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* appeared in 1937, under the auspices of Yale's IHR, the attention that it drew from both within and well beyond the academic world must have pleased Dollard. At least it secured him a permanent position in New Haven. The book was reviewed in all the major organs of the social and behavioral science disciplines, and although not all the comments were positive, they all took stock of Dollard's innovative use of psychoanalytic insights to understand society. Much as Dollard had hoped, a number of his reviewers took *Caste and Class* as a southern version of Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown* studies, portraying the dangers and irrationalities lurking in small town-America, no less in the South than the Midwest. To most black intellectuals, race relations experts, and the like, *Caste and Class* was a

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<sup>140</sup> Here, perhaps, is the psychological root for the southern brand of racial liberalism that puts community self-determination and privatization at its center, renouncing overt segregation for a more refined sense of class privilege: to satisfy northern moral rectitude *white maintaining the caste oppressions that sustained their social positions*.

“vigorous and new interpretation of familiar behavior,” in the words of Charles S. Johnson, making it an important salvo on the American race problem. To *New York Times* reviewer William Shanks Meacham, Dollard’s analysis revealed that particularly southern mind-set that allowed southern leaders to deny that the South had a race problem at all.<sup>141</sup>

*Caste and Class* did of course meet with substantive criticism, mainly from those intellectuals who were in the best position to understand its real significance. In a review published in *Christendom*, Franklin Frazier pointed to Dollard’s success at showing the role attitudes played in maintaining the caste system, and in dealing “so frankly and fundamentally with the sexual factor” in southern race relation.<sup>142</sup> At the same time, though, Frazier thought that Dollard’s concern with his own biases, and his strict adherence to a purported ideal of objectivity—the same trait that earned him respect from his academic reviewers and credibility among his colleagues at the IHR—rendered him morally sterile. “Civilized men,” Frazier intoned, must judge harshly any social system which subjects some part of its constituents “to the sadistic impulses and cruelty of their overlords and destroys their personal dignity,” as Dollard acknowledged the caste system did to southern blacks.<sup>143</sup> Writing in Lillian Smith’s liberal southern journal, the *North Georgia Review*, Du Bois thought that Dollard’s “brilliant psychoanalytical interpretation” was “at once the most frank and penetrating analysis of southern mentality which I have ever read.”<sup>144</sup> Where Frazier found fault in Dollard’s lack of moral vision,

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<sup>141</sup> William Shanks Meacham, “Southern Social Relationships” *CASTE AND CLASS IN A SOUTHERN TOWN*. By John Dollard. 502 pp. New Haven: Yale University Press. \$3.50. *New York Times Book Review* (December 5, 1937).

<sup>142</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, “Racial Culture and Conflict,” *Christendom* (1938): pp. 504-507.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>144</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Southern Trauma,” *North Georgia Review* 2 (Winter, 1937-8): pp. 9-10. Reprinted in Herbert Apthaker, ed., *Book Reviews by W.E.B. Du Bois* (Millwood, N.Y., KTO Press, 1977), 176-177.

though, Du Bois thought that the real shortcoming of *Caste and Class* was its circumscribed sense the sociological background of the South—the kind offered in Powdermaker’s *After Freedom*, as Du Bois pointed out.<sup>145</sup>

Right though Frazier and Du Bois may have been, the sharpest assessment of Dollard’s achievement in *Caste and Class* came from Donald Davidson, the preeminent southern Agrarian and regionalist social critic. Penned for *The American Review*, a prestigious journal of conservative opinion and culture (with no small streak of fascist sympathies, at least among its editors), Davidson titled his long review “Gulliver With Hay Fever,” a snide allusion indicative of the southerners’ opinion of Dollard’s efforts.<sup>146</sup> Grasping that Dollard’s was “a pretentious book, which undoubtedly bids for something more than a professional audience,” Davidson was sure that “If we may judge by the past, its findings are likely to be put to use in the next wave of social reform directed at the South.” Continuing, Davidson asked “Are the great research funds that once were developed to such understandable and worthy projects as the attack on yellow fever and hookworm now to be extended to the eradication of the so-called ‘psychoses’ of the Southern mind?” Although American psychologists never earned quite enough political capital to launch such an eradication program across the whole of the South, Davidson was not far off on his understanding of the logic and ambition of the therapeutic impulse. Moreover, his sense of the wider significance of Dollard’s interpretation of the southern mind was spot on: likening Dollard’s “particular variety of social scientist” to “the old-

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 176. On the successes and critics of *Caste and Class* as well as the relationship between its reception by the community at Yale and the ultimate rejection of Hortense Powdermaker’s companion study *After Freedom* see Anne C. Rose, “Putting the South on the Psychological Map: The Impact of Region and Race on the Human Sciences during the 1930s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 71 (May 2005).

<sup>146</sup> Donald Davidson, “Gulliver With Hay Fever,” *The American Review* 9, 2 (1938): 152-172.

time abolitionist,” Davidson knew that when it came to the problem of race prejudice, the southerner would be “impeached and found guilty before he can ever begin to state his case. [He] will be convicted on evidence procured from the sewers of Freudian psychology, and every protest that he makes will be taken only as further demonstration of the theory of evidence under which he is being condemned.”<sup>147</sup>

Although Dollard lacked the open political commitments that characterized his fellow anti-racist intellectuals, *Caste and Class* was nonetheless part of a broad-based ideology of scientific anti-racism that was just then beginning to cohere in the 1930s. In it, he aimed to show educated, middle-class white northerners—the social class with which he explicitly identified—what went on in the South behind the psychological scenes of violence and oppression. Because his sense of the basic operations of racist white psyche and the dynamics of race prejudice proved highly durable, Dollard’s work drove a larger, decisive shift in American racial discourse—a shift that relocated the ideological core of the race problem from *racialized bodies* to *racist minds*. As such, the psychological portrait of ‘the racist white psyche’ that Dollard composed served as the ideological core of the basic reform measures of American racial liberalism. Davidson sensed exactly this shift in Dollard’s psychoanalysis of southern race prejudice. But, the prosecution of white southerners for their prejudice did not follow Dollard’s indictment, as Davidson feared. Instead, the War and wartime exigencies provided the South a reprieve, but not a commutation. By the late 1940s, white southern racism again drew the nation’s attention, and the psychology of the white southern psyche re-emerged as a national problem.

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<sup>147</sup> Davidson, “Gulliver with Hay Fever,” 167.

Ironically, the outbreak of the second Great War served as both the agent of this temporary reprieve, as well as the harbinger of the renewed assault on southern white supremacy. In the intervening years, a host of more immanent threats—the march of jackboots and the terror of the *blitzkrieg* in Europe, the contagion of anti-Semitism at home, and the growing specter of mass racial violence in northern cities—diverted the attention of anti-racist psychologists and intellectuals, and the nation as a whole. Explaining and combating this world-wide “epidemic of racism,” as one of Dollard’s intellectual allies, Ruth Benedict called it, demanded nothing less than a full-scale intellectual and cultural mobilization against “race” and race prejudice. In taking up this effort, as chapter two will chronicle, anti-racist intellectuals like Benedict also set out in search of ‘the racist white psyche.’ And, although they went looking in very different places—namely, to the profusion of myths and stories and cultural artifacts about racial groups that spread the epidemic of racial hatred around the world—they brought with them many of the same concepts, concerns, and modes of thinking that Dollard brought with him to the South. For these intellectuals, understanding the appeal of racial myths to the white imagination, and explaining their effects on the behavior of white people in Europe and the U.S., called forth many of the same cultural and psychological insights as encountering the southern white psyche. In so doing, they both broadened the scope of psychological and cultural analyses of white racism, as well as added a new dimension to the intellectual history of American anti-racism.

## **Chapter 2:** **“Man’s Most Dangerous Myth”:** **Race, Racism, and History in the 1930s**

As 1939 drew to a close, and the shadow of war lengthened again across Europe, Ruth Benedict put the finishing touches on her second book, a popular primer she titled, simply, *Race: Science and Politics*. Benedict wrote *Race* to provide the reading public with an up-to-date account of scientific thinking on race and racial differences. To this end, she sifted through the storehouse of writing that her friend and mentor, Franz Boas, had built up over his 30 years of anti-racist thinking and activism, selecting his most incisive material and recasting it in every-day language. Even as she became the public mouthpiece of the Boasian case “against race,” though, and held out hope that her synopsis might help inoculate some people against the spread of racial propaganda, Benedict privately harbored serious doubts.

She knew that presenting “what is known scientifically about Race” stood little chance of combating irrational prejudices. She knew that the questions about race toward which anthropologists usually directed themselves—questions about the heritability of “culture,” the inferiority and superiority of racial groups, and notions of “racial purity”—shed little light on the role of racial prejudices in the current global crisis. She knew that the strength of Hitler’s appeal to the German people came not from his arguments, or their confusion about the race concept, but rather from some much deeper, darker need in the human psyche. So, after using the first half of *Race* to recapitulate well-worn arguments against the popular concept of race, Benedict turned her attention to a more pertinent question: “Why is there an epidemic of racism in the

world today?”<sup>1</sup>

While Benedict’s question may seem self-evident in retrospect, for most of her readers, the opening pages of *Race* would have been the first time they saw the term “racism” in print.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was an idea that Benedict herself was only just then beginning to give shape. Benedict’s turn to a new idea—to “racism”—spoke to a deeper intellectual crisis about “race” that had been festering among American intellectuals for the better part of two decades. Benedict knew that “race,” as commonly used, *simply did not exist*. Yet, she also knew that the “unproved assumption of the biological and perpetual superiority of one human group over another” had only tightened its grip on the minds of intellectual elites and the general public alike, despite more than twenty years of painstaking scientific research to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> “Race” was not a problem; *belief in race* was. How to account for this bitter irony? How to explain the enthrallment of the German people to false Nazi bromides? Further, the privation, insecurity, and powerful currents of fear that haunted everyday life in the 1930s surely played a part in the spread of racial hatred across the globe, but *which* part, Benedict wondered? Prevailing concepts like ‘ethnocentrism,’ ‘prejudice,’ ‘attitudes,’ and ‘stereotypes’ failed to capture either the breadth or the gravity of the threat. Benedict coined “racism” to offer a way out of this conundrum.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Race: Science and Politics* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), iii.

<sup>2</sup> The etymology of “racism” is open to some interpretation. The term did appear in a tract by the American fascist, Lawrence Dennis, in *The Coming American Fascism* in 1935, lacking, of course, the normative cast the Benedict gave the idea. *Racism* was also the title given the 1938 translation of Magnus Hirschfeld’s *Rasismus* (1934). A German-Jewish sexologist often considered the intellectual founder of the modern gay rights movement, Hirschfeld used the term to refer to Nazi anti-Semitism, which he likened to the persistence discrimination and broader treatment of homosexuals. “Racism” was also used a few times in Herbert Seligmann, *Race Against Man* (1939), which I will discuss at length below. For a more detailed treatment of the evolution of the term “racism,” see George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), Appendix: “The Concept of Racism in Historical Discourse,” or Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown’s useful introduction, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict, *Race*, vi.



To a cultural anthropologist of Benedict's intellectual persuasion, the answers to all these questions laid in the 'patterns of culture' and psychology of modern, white Europeans and Americans. She had made a start of this inquiry in her 1934 landmark, *Patterns of Culture*, in which she outlined the cultural bases of "Anglo-Saxon" intolerance, and laid out how the anomalous and transitory spread of "white culture" across the globe fostered an unjustified sense of white racial superiority.<sup>4</sup> But, given her intended audience with *Race*, and her own sense of the challenges of applying anthropological insights to modern societies, Benedict turned to a corps of ideas she thought would be much more familiar to her readers to elucidate the nature of "racism." "Racism," she thought, was "the new Calvinism," the dogma "that one group has the stigmata of superiority and the other has those of inferiority."<sup>5</sup> In a different vein, she wrote that "racism" was an "-ism of the modern world," a modern "superstition," and a "myth."

Her choice of metaphors notwithstanding, Benedict was neither a scholar of religion, nor a political scientist. Of all the ideas she leveraged to make sense of "racism," only "myth" had analytical significance for her. Unsurprisingly, then, Benedict treated the racial beliefs of modern white people as if they were akin to the myths of 'primitive' people—as if they were artifacts of "culture" offering insights into the "personality writ large" of modern peoples. Unlike the myths of indigenous peoples, though, which Benedict and her cohort of Boasian cultural anthropologists sought to preserve and learn from, the racial myths of modern people stood outside the circle of empathetic reflection, beyond the sphere of cultural relativism. The myth of "race"—

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, chapter 1, on the "Science of Custom." Also, see chapters 7 and 8, on "The Nature of Society," and "The Individual and the Pattern of Culture."

<sup>5</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 5.

“man’s most dangerous myth,” as one of Benedict’s fellow anthropologist and anti-racist ally, Ashley Montagu called it a few years later—warranted only repudiation.<sup>6</sup>

When it came to conveying her thinking about “racism” to her readers, though—when it came to answering why an “epidemic of racism” was spreading across the globe in the 1930s—Benedict did not turn only to the ‘cultural’ analysis that had made her famous. She also turned to history. In part, this stemmed from her use of the concept of myth as a template for analyzing “racism.” Myths, in the Boasian tradition, had to be studied historically. In Benedict’s rendering, this meant that “Racism, like any dogma that cannot be scientifically demonstrated, must be studied historically. We must investigate the conditions under which it arises and the uses to which it is put.”<sup>7</sup>

Benedict translated this intellectual mandate into “A Natural History of Racism,” as she called it, a succinct yet sweeping account of the creation and evolution of racial beliefs within Western civilization. In doing so, she posited that *all species of racism*, whether anti-Semitism or Aryanism, Nativism or southern white supremacy, germinated from a common seed, and shared a common path of development. Telling such a history, she thought, revealed both the larger pattern of “racism” in Western civilization, as well as the institutional, political, and psychological underpinnings that brought such a pattern into being. Telling such a history, she hoped, might actually effect how people understood the events of the day.

Far from an isolated intellectual adventure, Benedict’s redefinition of “race” as a myth signaled her connection to a nascent intellectual movement that was coalescing in the 1930s. With roots stretching back to the opening shots of the First World War, this

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<sup>6</sup> Ashley Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia university press, 1942). I pick up the story of Ashley Montagu and his work in chapter three.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 153-4.

movement centered around recasting the racial beliefs of modern white people in the mold of myths. She was one of a host of anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and anti-racist journalists and intellectuals who, similarly galvanized by the rise of Nazism, thought that tracing the history of racial beliefs provided a means of explaining and combating the “epidemic of racism” overcoming the world.<sup>8</sup> Using the concept of myth as a guide, they developed both an attack on Nazism, as well as a wider, historical theory of “racism” for the modern world.<sup>9</sup> As early as 1932, the self identified founder of the “cultural approach” to history and fellow Columbia University institution, historian Jacques Barzun, began the work that eventually became *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition* (1937), his “critical study of the ‘Race idea’ in our time.”<sup>10</sup> In 1934, Benedict’s friend, colleague, and fellow Boasian anthropologist, Paul Radin, published *The Racial Myth* (1934), his pointed account of the role of race in “the crisis of civilization through which we are now passing.”<sup>11</sup> Working this same vein of analysis, the journalist and civil rights activist Herbert J. Seligmann wrote *Race Against Man* (1938), his jeremiad against the “neobarbarian assault on our common humanity”—with a forward by none other than Boas himself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The 1930s witnessed a parallel development in historical accounts of slavery that should be seen as a complement or a counterpoint to the histories of “racism” I address here. These would include W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, and Ralph Bunche, *A Worldview of Race*, among others.

<sup>9</sup> According to Benedict’s biographers and scholars, *Race: Science and Politics* was a minor work, containing little original thinking. I argue that *Race* has to be read along side these other books. Taken together, they represent a key stage in the evolution of liberal thought about the nature or white racial prejudice, from a hatred born of unfamiliarity, to a positive system of beliefs rooted in a socio-historical culture.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Barzun, *The French Race* (1932) and *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition* (1937)

<sup>11</sup> Paul Radin, *The Racial Myth* (1934), vii.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Seligmann, *Race Against Man* (1939). Obviously, Radin and Benedict knew each other. As for the rest, if they had relationship, I do not know. Other books in this grain include that by the Boasian anthropologists and psychoanalyst Ashley Montagu, titled *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth* (1942) and Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (1944), and scientific popularizer Leo Snyder’s *Race: A History of Modern Ethnic Theories* (1939), among others. These works are the first histories of the race concept, marking it as the beginning of a line of thought that would include Thomas

As a group, Benedict, Radin, Barzun, and Seligmann shared a liberal cosmopolitan sensibility, a hatred of fascism, and a common close-orbit to Franz Boas and his ideas. More broadly, they were part of an international, cosmopolitan, largely radical intellectual community that felt the threat of fascism as a racial movement with particular acuteness. Many members of this community were American Jews, like Seligmann, or Jewish émigrés to the United States, like Radin, who left Lodz for America while still a small boy in the 1880s, and retained deep personal and emotional ties to the Polish-Jewish community of his birth. Nor was ethnic-racial identity alone the marker of membership. Barzun, for instance, possessed few of the organic connections that characterized anti-racist intellectual. But, as the son of a poet-turned diplomat, born into cosmopolitan currents in his hometown of Creteil, France, he too recognized the dangers of racial myths. Indeed, these intellectuals were among the first to see that racial ideology played a central role in turning German nationalism toward fascism. Moreover, they saw that “racism,” in any of its forms, was the dark, beating heart of anti-democratic, anti-humanist movements the world over.

As anti-racist intellectuals, this group understood their charge as one of unmasking the dominant racial myths at work in the modern world, to show people the political, economic, and psychological interests that hid behind such beliefs. The thrust of their attacks was visible in the terms they chose to describe and define the concept of “race.” In their work, “race” became an “illusion,” or a “fiction,” a “superstition,” a “shibboleth,” a “dogma,” a “doctrine.” The idea that commonly evoked races constituted biologically distinct groups—whether “Nordic,” “Teutonic,” “Aryan,” “Celtic,”

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Gossett, *Race: The History of An Idea in America* (1963), Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black* (1968), George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (1971), and continues with Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (2010).

“Semitic,” or, as Melville Herskovits would show in 1941, even “Negro,”—was “a modern mythology,” in the words of anthropologist Robert Redfield.<sup>13</sup> Part of a sophisticated intellectual gambit, these lexical permutations all shared the same dual purpose. First, they pushed most of what had counted as the science of race beyond the pale of legitimate intellectual debate. Indeed, by using “myth” as their default term for identifying ideas about race, they were actively classifying most “race-thinking,” as Barzun called it, as widely held, dangerous, and erroneous social beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Such “racism” no longer had to be argued with, but rather “judged by its fruits and its votaries and its ulterior purposes.”<sup>15</sup>

Second, this maneuver also recast prevailing ideas about “race” as artifacts of culture, as raw material for a new kind of analysis. These intellectuals were all part of the broader shift toward cultural and psychological approaches to human behavior, or what one historian has recently dubbed the “social constructionist” turn in American social thought.<sup>16</sup> As such, they aimed to understand the beliefs and behaviors of white Europeans and Americans about “race” as a function of culture and psychology.<sup>17</sup> In this,

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Redfield, “What We Do Know About Race,” *Science* 57 (Sept., 1943): 194.

<sup>14</sup> There was tension inherent to this idea. To people like Barzun and Montagu, “race” was only a myth, only a social belief system. But, for Benedict and most of her anthropological cohort, race did have an ontological status independent from its popular or common usage; “race” only became dangerous when it was applied incorrectly to the world by “racists” or “racialists” who were practicing “racism.”

<sup>15</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 153.

<sup>16</sup> Literature on this complex turn in American social thought is growing. See, most recently, Joanne Meyerowitz, “‘How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Constructionist Thought” *The Journal of American History* (2010) 96(4): 1057-1084.

<sup>17</sup> I see this chapter working at the intersection of two historiographical trends. Firstly, I see these thinkers as part of the “culture and personality” movement, and particularly the phase of the movement when “culture” began to ‘come home’ to modern Western peoples. The first scholar to key into this trend was Warren Sussman, in his essay on “the domestication of culture in the 1930s.” More recently, besides the Meyerowitz essay mentioned above, Susan Hegeman’s *Patterns for America* explores the creation of “American Culture” as a discrete object in American intellectual life, and Michaela di Leonardo’s *Exotics at Home* outlines the complex legacy of the tradition of “Americanist” anthropology. I see these intellectuals as on the cutting edge of drawing whites *as whites* into the sphere of culture.

Secondly, I see this work as part of the emerging historiography on “The Liberal Orthodoxy” on Race, “Racial Liberalism,” or liberal anti-racism of wartime and postwar Era. Intellectually, this orthodoxy rested

their analyses of racial myths ran along a parallel track to John Dollard's study of psychological dynamics of the southern caste system. From different angles, both sought to uncover the underlying motive forces animating white racial prejudice, and to connect such prejudices to larger historical and social formations. But, rather than using life-history interviews and direct observations to access 'the racist white psyche,' these intellectuals turned their attentions toward the vast outpouring of racial myth-making available all around them, including putatively scientific or scholarly treatises on "race," white supremacist propaganda, common stories, and even popular culture. In other words, 'the racist white psyche' was one enthralled to the myth of "race."

"Race," in this guise, was a manufactured system of beliefs—an ideology, a mythology, a 'pattern' of "racism"—that cohered over time, and in response to larger historical events. Understanding this pattern of "racism" entailed elucidating the complex interplay of culture and psychology, or in this case, the relationship between "race-thinking" and the "race-mind" it presupposed. And, crucially, it meant outlining the political and economic forces that animated such patterns. At its base, then, this conception of "racism" challenged common, naturalistic notions of race prejudice. Seen as intertwined with a broader system of ideas, race prejudices appeared as something more than the possession of baseless 'stereotypes,' the inculcation of errant 'attitudes,'

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on a 'prejudice paradigm,' or the creation of 'race prejudice-race relations' discourse about race and the problems of race in mid-century American social thought. See Graham Richards, *"Race," Racism, and Psychology: Toward a Reflexive History* (1997), James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (1993), and Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (1995), or more recently, John P. Jackson, Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (2004), particularly chapters 6 and 7, among other books. As they show, ideas and intellectuals coming from psychology, social psychology, and sociology, especially by the late-1940s, dominated this discourse. The group of intellectuals I treat here contributed to the opening of this paradigm during the 1930s and early 1940s, but many of their ideas and analytical approaches did not survive to become part of that orthodoxy.

or the expression of essential ‘ethnocentrism’ or fundamental status conservatism.<sup>18</sup>

Although Radin, Barzun, Seligmann and Benedict used these basic ideas as conceptual building blocks in their effort to construct a psychological model of white racial prejudice, they also embedded them in a broader intellectual framework that highlighted the man-made character of “race.”

The analytical strategy to the problem of “racism” that Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict devised placed a heavy burden of responsibility of the anti-racist intellectual. Indeed, their conception of “racism” structured the intellectual and moral imperatives of *anti-racism*. Because it was “impossible to fight the real forces behind race-hatred until they have been uncovered,” the role of the anti-racist intellectual was to do the uncovering—to excavate the origins of racial beliefs, identify the ways in which those beliefs served political aims or economic interests, and reveal the deeper psychological needs and mechanisms which lent “racism” its persuasive power. Even the metaphors that they chose to describe “racism” emphasized their role as intellectuals in this process. Rather than a social force unto itself, “racism” was a mystification, a surface encrustation covering over deeper and universal psychological, social, economic, and political forces. The meaning of “racism” then, like the meaning of all systems of belief, had to be found beneath its surface. Understanding the visible epiphenomena of “racism” required interpretation, demystification, and expertise of exactly the type that

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<sup>18</sup> Works covering the history of ‘race relations’ discourse of the 1910s and 1920s, and its psychological strain abound. Useful to me have been James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (1993) and Graham Richards, “Race,” *Racism and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (1997). In either case, the key conceptual unity running through this discourse, whether its sociological or psychological variants, was a notion that a linear or a mechanical relationship prevailed between racial ideas—attitudes, stereotypes, or ethnocentrism—and the observable behavior of racial hatred, segregation, and violence. For those influenced by behaviorism, like the loosely-jointed ‘cultural pluralism’ movement, these attitudes were learned, and thus could be unlearned. For those who took their cues from William Graham Sumner’s idea of ethnocentrism, the source of race prejudice was more organic, arising for group membership in ways that resembled the kind of instinctive prejudice it purported to reject.

these intellectuals possessed in spades.

Benedict, Radin, Barzun, and Seligmann intended their histories of “racism” to stand as scholarly projects, to be sure, but their main purpose was to provide a foundation for a broader moral, intellectual, and cultural *anti-racism*. Although they shared an intellectual agenda and an analytical sensibility with Dollard, they parted with him by openly allying their work with an active political movement. Taken together, they used the mode of history to present a comprehensive interpretation of “race” as a social problem, including an idea of its causes and central dynamics, as well as a prospectus on how it might be solved. Given that their thinking about “racism” grew out of the same political and cultural nexus that gave rise to New Deal efforts at social democracy, popular anti-fascist internationalism, and, of course, support for ethno-racial pluralism, their interpretation of the problem of “racism” was part of the development of the Popular Front anti-racism that was in its heyday in the 1930s. In this, they were in a fight not only against the forces marshaled behind “racism” itself, but also to redirect liberalism and the broader political Left against “racism.” To this end, they chose to present this interpretation *as a story*. They wrote anti-racist histories that conveyed, through their drama, narrative structure, tropes, and codes, an implicitly anti-racist sensibility. Their work was not only an attack on “racism;” it contained within it a positive statement on the character, obligations, and possibilities of anti-racism. Further, it rested on a faith that, in discerning the patterns of ideas and the patterns of their use, a way could be found to break the hold of “racism” on the modern world.

The analyses of “racism” that Radin, Barzun, Benedict, and Seligmann sketched out—as acts of anti-racist scholarship, as interpretations of their own times, as products



of their intellectual milieu—constituted a pivotal chapter in the history of American anti-racism. These intellectuals not only showed that Nazi claims of “Nordic” superiority and “Aryan” purity were false, but that such claims were part of a long and deadly tradition of intellectual fallacies, carried on by charlatans, largely in service to anti-democratic, anti-humanist, and counter-egalitarian political and economic interests. They showed that “racism,” global in its scope, always fomented social conflict, and was universally pernicious in its consequences. They showed how “racism” preyed upon the fears and uncertainties of common people to win their allegiance to causes that were not naturally their own.

Further, through their work, this intellectual community outlined a portable, “universalist” idea of “racism,” a conceptual wide-angle lens allowing them to see slavery, genocide, imperialism, extreme nationalism, and war together within one frame. This frame was held together not by the putative biological and inherently antagonizing differences between peoples, but rather by a common set of beliefs, a common psychology, and a common power dynamic between political classes. These intellectuals launched a broader inquiry into the place of “race” in Western culture and thought. They sought to understand whether it was a pseudo-tradition, a deformation of Western civilization, or endemic to it. They outlined, in part, the appropriate response: beyond showing that “racism” was wrong, it was the responsibility of anti-racist intellectuals to expose the interlocking material and psychological forces behind race-hatred and conflict, so as to allow the people to see and address the real sources of social strife.

***Imagining a History of “Racism”***

Benedict, Radin, Barzun, and Seligmann worked out a new conception of “racism”

through writing historical accounts of the origin, spread, and rise of the world's major racial myths. They each wrote from a slightly different angle, and with a different treatment of that history in mind. For instance, while Benedict covered her "natural history of Racism" in one long chapter placed before her analysis of the current wave of "race prejudice," Barzun wrote a nearly encyclopedic account of every major manifestation of "race" in European culture, social thought, science, and politics, mixing between treatments of single myths, entire disciplines, and historical periods—with American references thrown in for perspective. Where Radin's history of "the racial myth" unfolded in a single narrative, Seligmann covered the same basic story through individual chapters dedicated to the "Nordidiocy or Rampant Racism" of the Nazis, "Negroes and 'The Race Problem,'" "The Jew and Anti-Semitism," and "The Stranger Among Us" (about American Nativism)—the juxtaposition of these as coequal phases of the same problem itself serving as a sign of the expansive quality of their idea of "racism." And yet, their narratives evinced strong similarities. Indeed, they each told essentially the same story, replete with the same cast of historical actors, major turning points, sense of historical change, and *telos*—Nazism and the world crisis of the 1930s.

Additionally, they shared a single purpose, namely to enlist history alongside anthropology, psychology, and biology as a critical weapon against Nazism and against the wider movement of "racism" from which it grew. Although they made use of the scholarship of a few established historians, including the British anti-imperialist Alfred Toynbee among others, they were interested in history more as practice than as a discipline. They turned toward historical practice as a tool of anti-racism out of the belief that, much as properly generated scientific evidence disproved the suppositions

about the biological inferiorities or superiorities of racial groups, setting the mythological accounts of racial groups against the actual historical record of humanity would open a clear line of attack on the conceits of white racial supremacy. After all, they knew that none of the plethora of popular paeans for the so-called Nordic, Aryan, and Teutonic peoples penned since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and revitalized during the 1930s under the banner of Nazism, could withstand historical scrutiny. Instead, these stories were each versions of the same racial “dogma” that, as Benedict wrote it, “one race has carried progress with it throughout human history and can alone ensure future progress.”<sup>19</sup> Historicizing racial myths provided a means of showing that this “dogma” was “a creation of our own time,” reflecting present-day concerns more than past events. This was not history for its own sake, then, but rather history as ‘myth-busting.’

While using history as a critical tool of anti-racism distinguished Benedict, Radin, Barzun, and Seligmann from other intellectual anti-racists, their project was not one wholly without precedence. Indeed, much of their analysis of the Nazi “Nordic myth” and popular appeals to the “Aryan race” represented the culmination of a line of thinking about the mythic nature of the “race” first developed, unsurprisingly, by Franz Boas. Beginning in the 1910s, and extending through the mid-1920s, Boas penned a series of popular essays showing that the “Nordic Myth” was an ‘invention’ of men like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard. In tracing back this invented intellectual tradition, Boas identified the key critiques of racial myth-making, including its social class origins among “the educated elite,” and its utility in extending nationalist claims against broader humanist aspirations. Benedict, Radin, Barzun, and Seligmann picked up this line of analysis in the 1930s, and sharpened it with new insights from the psychology of Freud

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<sup>19</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 153.

and his disciples, a keener focus on the role of ideas and intellectuals in political and social life, and a more incisive sense of the material bases of history. Yet, throughout these new histories of “racism,” clear echoes of Boas’s thinking about the history of racial beliefs and the role they played in modern life remained.

As these anti-racist intellectuals all understood, though, simply discrediting particular racial myths could not be counted on to loosen the grip such stories held on the popular imagination. Indeed, on this score, they all voiced real pessimism. So, in taking on nearly a century’s worth of putative historical scholarship, and the well-entrenched narratives of racial progress and degeneration such accounts enshrined, these anti-racist intellectuals also took up a broader challenge. They set out to write the history of “racism” as a counter-narrative, an anti-racist story that could serve as a replacement to the racial mythologies they were attacking—a coherent story about where “racism” came from, why it emerged, and what damage “racism” wrought on the world. As such, they superimposed the historical development of “racism” over a fairly familiar narrative account of the rise of modern Western Civilization. This was meant to be a story that could be understood, retold, and spread as easily as racial myths had been; disseminated to everyday men and women of good faith to inoculate them against the seductions of racial myths, and perhaps even to disentrall them from their present prejudices. It was meant to be a new, scientifically legitimate, humanist story to replace racial myths, one that might form a broad foundation for anti-racist thinking, and they even hoped, an anti-racist *culture*.

In addition to the challenges of writing a history of ideas about race, writing such an account along *anti-racist* lines took a rather considerable leap of the historical

imagination. After all, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict had been reared in a world that saw history itself largely as accounts of the origins, migrations, conquests, and cultural achievements (or lack thereof) of particular racial groups, all written up in the spirit of exultation. Indeed, they had been reared in a world that saw in “race”—in the unfettered expression of the “racial genius” of certain white races, or in the unmitigated conflict between racial groups, or perhaps in the “racial uplift” of inferior groups by superior groups—the key force of historical change and engine of ‘Progress.’ Moreover, racial accounts of history, by animating the otherwise obscure scientific falsifications of racial anthropology, psychology and biology into a compelling, popular narrative format, served as perhaps the most prolific and dangerous medium for conveying racism to the public. Writing an anti-racist history, then, meant depicting alternative notions of historical change predicated on a sense of the nature of society, and even basic human psychology, that rejected the essential logic of race.

More than a conscious reconstruction of historical practice, writing this anti-racist history entailed developing a host of ideas that comported with their cosmopolitan humanist sensibility. They adhered to an inherently normative concept of “racism” as neither natural nor normal, but constructed and destructive. For instance, in place of the core assumption that humanity was composed of irreconcilable racial groups, easily arranged into a hierarchy of ability—the core assumption of “racialists” from Heine and Herder, to Blumenbach and Stoddard—these anti-racist intellectuals offered a vision of society in which ethnic and cultural identities were fluid, multiple, shared, and ever changing. In the place of the notion that racial strife was “the natural conflict of two non-congruent entities,” as Barzun phrased it—the key assumption of racial Darwinists

and Chicago School sociologists alike—they offered a vision of society fractured by basic conflicts of interest between political and economic classes, not races.<sup>20</sup> They substituted the image of different racial groups driven by an instinctive “race prejudice,” with a ‘psychic history of “mankind,”’ a story of how the psychological appeal of racial myths changed over time in response to broader historical conditions.

Working from each of these foundational conceptions, they constructed a distinct idea of historical change. As they told it, history unfolded through the operation of deeper material forces, and the struggles between classes rather than races. At an elemental level, then, this new history of racism read as a series of implicit, anti-racist counter-arguments aimed at racist intellectuals and demagogues. But, in re-imagining the history of Western Civilization along anti-racist lines, they also challenged the linear conception of historical progress that undergirded liberal notions of modernity. Rather than a concatenating process of “development”—the keystone concept of Enlightenment notions of historical progress—playing out in the West, they cast historical change as the product of discoveries and creation among peoples of very different cultures through time. And, more importantly, cast historical progress as the outcome of cooperation and borrowing among these diverse cultures. More than a repudiation of racist notions of history, these intellectuals also offered up an alternative conception to liberal notions of modernity itself.

Above these more formal, scholarly innovations, though, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict wrote narrative histories of racism because they wanted to fashion *anti-racist stories*. They wanted to animate the history of racism with the same ways narrative devices—with the same world-wide significance, dramatic richness, and

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<sup>20</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 255.

conflict—that characterized the histories of “Nordic” or “Aryan” supremacy. The difference, of course, was that the history of racism was fundamentally inclusionary, pertaining, they thought, to anyone threatened by the instrumentalization of racial dogmas. As such, they wove their historical narratives out of a host literary tropes and narrative structures, creating an anti-racist version of modern Western history. In a broad sense, their histories read like jeremiads—historical accounts of how the humanity found itself perched on edge of a catastrophe—focusing on the role that racism played in leading it there. More often, though, their histories read as a morality play of racism, one that resonated with the Popular Front. And, at a deeper level—particularly with the anthropologists Radin and Benedict—their histories read as parables for the modern world, as a lesson as to what lay ahead if humanity did not renounce its fealty to the “the bloodshot mirage” of race.<sup>21</sup>

Writing works of popular social thought, they hoped that their histories of racism would resonate with a broad audience. As such, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict patterned the narrative of their histories according to familiar and easily accessible forms. The history of racism was a history of economic and political elites—of when and how powerful groups and interests in given societies deployed racism to advance their own parochial interests. It was also the history of why ‘the people,’ or ‘the masses’ succumbed at various points to the anti-social, anti-humanist entreaties of racism. In tone and narrative structure, they sketched out these histories in the mode of a Popular Front morality play, one that placed the conflict between political and economic elites and the masses of everyday people at its center. This form drew upon literary tropes that would have been fairly familiar to readers in the 1930s, namely those that

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<sup>21</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 4.

revolved around the “laboring of American culture.”<sup>22</sup> Inspired by the struggle of working people, the story that Benedict, Barzun and the others wrote identified the drama at the core of the story of “progress” not as a struggle between the ‘savages’ and the ‘civilized,’ as previous racial narrative asserted, but instead as a contest between autocrats, dictators, and demagogues on one hand, and the ‘people’ on the other. In this story, “racism” was the tool—perhaps the preferred tool—by which elites manipulated, distracted, or, more recently, divided the people against one another so as to carry out their anti-democratic agenda. The aim here, of course, was to fit the history of racism into popular political narratives of the late 1930s.

As well as this narrative structure worked for creating a good story, it presented a real dilemma on the level of social analysis. Explaining what motivated political and economic elites to pick up the cudgel of racism was easy enough: the lust for power and greed provided ample incentive. But, explaining why everyday people believed in racial myths, and supported politicians who trafficked in such beliefs was a different matter—all the more vexing considering that people usually gave over their allegiance contrary to their own economic interests. To unlock this conundrum, these anti-racist intellectuals deployed many of the same concepts and a similar line of psycho-cultural analysis that John Dollard used to understand the fealty of white southerners to the caste system. That said, Benedict, Radin, Barzun, and Seligmann, faced a different problem than did Dollard. Unlike southern white supremacy, which by Dollard’s reckoning bestowed both material and psychological benefits on southern whites, the racial solidarities sustained by most other racial myths seemed to offer no material or rational rewards. As a result,

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Denning coins this useful term in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso Books, 1998).



working from the assumption that most whites stood only to lose by their enthrallment to racial myths—in other words, that they were both the agents of racial hatred and violence as well as the victims of the wars and anti-democratic machination carried out in the name of “racism”—these intellectuals carved out a much broader explanatory role for the psychology of race prejudice.

Into this familiar narrative structure, these anti-racist scholars interjected one additional element that would have seemed quite novel to their readers: the key role played by intellectuals. To Benedict, Barzun, Seligmann, and Radin, though, this part of the drama possessed the greatest personal significance. At the most basic level, theirs was a story of, by, and for intellectuals. Throughout their narratives, they placed special emphasis on the production of knowledge about “race” and racial groups, focusing their attention on the men (and it was always men) who created racist ideas for the purpose of fomenting social conflict.<sup>23</sup> Why, they inquired, did certain intellectuals, scientists, artists, writers, professors, poets, and the like abandon their rightful obligation to truth and democracy in order to traffic in racial myths? Each in his or her own way, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict answered this question by placing the racist intellectual as the intermediary between the elites and the people. Put succinctly, their histories of racism recounted the gradual coalescence over time of a fundamental socio-political dynamic whereby intellectuals, at the behest of political and economic elites, fashioned racial myths into tools for the manipulation or mystification of ‘the people,’ all for the purposes of advancing narrow interests against the common good.

By casting the racist intellectual in this pivotal role, these anti-racist intellectuals

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<sup>23</sup> In this sense, they wrote sociologies of knowledge, taking after Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* (1932), one of the most widely read theoretical tracts of the 1930s.

lent their analyses a highly self-reflexive quality. The history of racism, then, was a history of their own kind—or, more specifically, a history of their intellectual nemeses. With few exceptions, they did not recount the work of any anti-racist opposition. Instead, more implicitly than explicitly, they positioned *themselves* as the opposition to the racist intellectuals who populated their historical narratives. This made the history “racism” in part autobiographical in *absentia*. They highlighted the role that anti-racist intellectuals had failed to play in the past relative to the work that they were performing in the present, and that a wider army of anti-racist intellectuals would have to play in the years ahead. By tracing the history of the cadre of intellectual elites who, quite literally, created the world’s dominate racial myths, they turned the history of racism into a call to intellectual arms of an anti-racist counter-elites—a call that they had answered.

### ***The Anti-Racist History of Racism***

Taken together, the histories of “racism” Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict constructed began with accounts or descriptions of the ancient world, primarily that of the Romans, their Hellenistic forbearers, and their imperial subjects. Placed in historical juxtaposition rather than in sequence, the ideas, images, and stories of the ancient world served as a foil or an Archimedean point to anchor their historical narratives. Beyond illustrating the fundament point that, for most of our history, humans lived and died, killed and reproduced, created and destroyed, traveled and traded without the slightest attention to “race,” the ancient world provided a window onto the early psychic history of humanity, a glimpse of the psychological state of people before they were “infected” with racism.

The differences between the modern and ancient world were not so great as to

defy empathetic identification, or to obviate its didactic significance. Social groups in the ancient world possessed much the same capacity and desire for “group egotism,” as Benedict called it—the sense that “I belong to the elect”—as people of the modern world.<sup>24</sup> And, what Radin called the archetypal myth of “the Golden Age”—the collective imaginings of a halcyon time before struggles and conflicts of the present, the yearning for a time when one’s own groups reigned supreme—held no less appeal then than it did in modern times.<sup>25</sup> These deep psychological desires, the seeds of the future appeal of racial myths, were particularly evident, ironically enough, among the early Jews and Romans. And, naturally, they played their part in the conflicts between peoples that riddled pre-modern times. But, such conflicts, these intellectuals determined, were decidedly *not* racial in nature. They lacked the hard-edged permanence and prohibitions on intermixing that attended latter day concepts of race, flowing instead from more mutable differences in culture, religion, social status, and fights over land. They were also frequently overridden by more powerful ethical values and social imperatives.

As Radin and Benedict in particular depicted them, the political, economic, and social structures of the ancient world brooked little acceptance for ideas of the innate and enduring superiority of members of certain groups, the hallmark of proper racism. Indeed, any ideas of enduring difference proved anathema to the omnivorous hunger for expansion adopted by the Hellenistic, and later, Roman Empires. In other words, these were not the ‘racial empires’ that characterized the modern world. The Romans, they argued, not only adopted the kind of tolerance of group differences that characterized their Greek forebears, but they also added to that heritage a principle of impartially

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 154-5.

<sup>25</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 6-12.

adjudicating the conflicts that arose among the many peoples of their dominion as a means of keeping peace and facilitating prosperity for all. As the Roman Empire evolved into the wider world of Christendom, so too grew an idea of the essential “unity of mankind,” an idea that stifled notions of special differences between peoples. None of the anti-racist intellectuals overlooked the limits of tolerance of the Roman Imperium, or the brutality the Romans imposed on those both within and ‘beyond the pale’—including, of course, the so-called ‘Germanic’ tribes who would serve as the spiritual ancestors to successive generations of Germans. But, they did think that such oppression and violence lacked the totalizing, annihilationist impulses that characterized racial conflicts.

More to the point, though, they did not let the dark side of that history cast a shadow over the deeper moral counterpoint the ancient world offered for their own times. As they saw it, the values and imperatives that shaped the ancient world, and ultimately gave rise to ‘Civilization’—including cosmopolitanism, tolerance (of a certain sort), just administration, and above all, *mixing*—stood in direct opposition to those succored by racists. As Radin aptly summarized, “the torch of civilization [has been] handed down from one generation to another, in many and diverse ways and by many and diverse peoples.” Further, during this millennia-long history of racial mixing and cultural cross-fertilization, not only did people of all races carry the torch, but more often it was people of mixed race who carried it the longest, and held it the highest.<sup>26</sup> As such, Radin and the others rooted their anti-racist imagination not in utopian visions of future harmony, revolutions in liberal sympathy, or changes in human nature; rather, they rooted their anti-racism in the recognition of the way things once were, in the

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<sup>26</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 72.

possibilities spelled out by a common history and common heritage that humanity already shared. Thus, they used an image of the past—a usable past of *greatness* founded on a species of practical pluralism—to offer a touchstone for an anti-racist vision of the future.

For these anti-racists intellectuals, the history of racism properly began, not with the creation of the first racial myths, or even at a particular moment time, but rather with the many-layered historical rupture of modernity. Of course, they all worked from a fairly conventional idea of what brought on the modern age, namely the rediscovery of Graeco-Roman culture, and the subsequent birth of the Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution, and the Renaissance. But, far more importantly, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict saw modernity as a series of massive social, political, and economic disruptions. Benedict, for her part, identified the coincident “decay of feudalism” and “decline of the secular power of the Papacy,” both well underway by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as the key markers of the disintegration of “the great institutions of medieval times,” and the birth of “the modern age.”<sup>27</sup> Radin identified modernity with the establishment of commercial capitalism across Europe at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the moment when a new class of “traders,” as he derisively called them, “transferred” the “competition, jealousy, envy, [and] trickery that are inevitable in trade and business... to every phase of life.”<sup>28</sup> To Barzun, the rupture of modernity occurred later still, with the cascading political conflicts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century between the rising, liberal bourgeoisie, the fading Catholic hierarchy and aristocracy, and, of course, the monarch—the clash of ideas, ideals, and interests that ultimately culminating in the French Revolution.

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<sup>27</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 164.

<sup>28</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 86.

Though they differed slightly on the chronological moment of modernity, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict believed that these massive changes touched off a process of racial mythmaking that persisted down to the present and animated the rise of racism. None of the great transformations wrought by these forces *caused* the invention of racial myths. They did, however, mark the onset of a period of endless change and ceaseless conflict. Moreover, they effectively disintegrated the foundations of the feudal social order that had persisted for centuries, thereby undermining the worldview—or “mythological world,” as Boas would have called it—that had been sustained by that stable universe. Benedict called this breakdown of the pre-modern social order a process of “separatism” that unfolded across the Continent, one that destroyed the long-standing sense of the “brotherhood of mankind” that had prevailed over Christendom.<sup>29</sup>

These massive transformations, and the conflicts they engendered, provided the necessary conditions for the creation of racism. Loosened from both the obligations to, and power over the people that characterized the pre-modern world order, social and political elites faced particular challenges in the modern age. Those whose superior position stemmed from institutions going into eclipse—like Benedict’s Catholic hierarchy and Barzun’s landed aristocracy—searched out means to slow or stop the decline of their power. Those groups who found new wealth and new power—like Radin’s capitalists—had to seek out new ideas with which to legitimate their rise. For these groups, neither old-world ideas about Christian fraternity, nor newer ideas about essential human equality held much purchase. They needed a new kind of thinking to make sense of their place in the world.

Benedict’s description of the cultural implications of the discovery of the New

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<sup>29</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 164

World in the 15<sup>th</sup> century exemplified all of their thinking on the relationship between modernity and creation of racism. While the romantic tales of New World adventure and glorifications of the “natives” thrilled those “stay-at-homes safe in the capitals of Europe,” the “frontiersmen, plantation owners and slave traders” busied themselves defining life on the other side of the Atlantic through their “implacable war of extermination and subjugation.” In this place of “exploitation and settlement,” the needs of the settlers strained against the age-old matrix of difference between “believer” and “unbeliever” that inhered to Christendom.<sup>30</sup> The prohibitions attending this delineation proved incongruent with the “rough and ready” situation faced by “settlers and administrators” in the New World, making “the time... ripe for a new theory of superiority and inferiority” to replace the old Catholic divisions between believer and un-believer.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Benedict speculated, the doctrine of racism might not “have been proposed at all... if the basis for it had not been laid in the violent experience of racial prejudice on the frontier.”<sup>32</sup> The process of constructing a new mythological world—the mythological world in which racial myths played the central role—began here.

But, the elite were not the only ones to experience the birth pangs of the modern age. Modernity also brought profound changes to the lives and everyday psychology of ordinary people, changes that proved central to the advent of racism. Modernity, they thought, inaugurated a new era for the people of Europe, and later, America, an era characterized by growing personal liberty, and wider patterns of travel and migration, as well as the democratization of social and political life—at least for some. Most people, however, experienced this deeper transformation on less ideal terms. The freedom that

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<sup>30</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 169.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

flowed from the decline of traditional authority often amounted to “the freedom to starve,” as Benedict saw it, the freedom to be forced off ancestral lands and to abscond to far-flung places. More than ever, they thought, the lives of common people came to be characterized by fear and insecurity, driven by the feeling that people now lived at the mercy of forces beyond their immediate community, control, or even comprehension. These changes made for psychologically fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of racial myths. In the place of the image of racially distinct peoples acting out their racial genius or guided by their racial instincts, then, these anti-racist intellectuals painted one of everyday people pushed to the edge of survival by larger conditions, and thus made vulnerable to superstitions of all sorts.

By choosing to intertwine their history of racism with a broader narrative of modernity and the Enlightenment in Europe, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict challenged a host of conceits in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century thinking about race, racial prejudice and historical change. Firstly, by setting the invention of racial myths within the context of the birth of the modern age these anti-racist intellectuals necessarily reduced the ontological status of “race” from an *agent* of historical change to a *symptom* of deeper forces—and thereby struck directly at the heart of racist thinking. “Race,” they determined, was not itself a force of history; “racism,” instead, was a contingency carried along by the flow of deeper currents.

On a different note, much of what counted for ‘moderate’ racial punditry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—including “New South” segregationists like Edgar Gardner Murphy and race relations theorists like Robert E. Park—posited that the prospects for reducing racial conflict and hostility rested on the beneficent work of the processes unleashed in



the modern age. The advance of science, rationality, and the reorganizing power of capitalism—‘Progress’—would spell the end for all pre-modern myths and irrational superstitions, including those at the heart of racial prejudice. In this view, disenchantment knew no boundaries, and would accomplish with time what politics could not. Modernization would uplift the ‘Native’ and the ‘Negro’ alike, and mitigate the ‘race-animosity’ of whites. Selling this kind of magic around the world, it was any wonder that Booker T. Washington was called “the Wizard of Tuskegee.” By suggesting that belief in race, and therefore race prejudice, was created in the modern age, and even by many of the same forces of modernity, these anti-racist intellectuals upended the core assumption of American social thought—indeed, of American culture.<sup>33</sup> They called into serious doubt the facile notion that racial myths had no place in the modern world, and that “racial progress” would inevitably triumph. Racial myths, they thought, would have to be fought to the end, and “racism” remained as current as any other modern ideology.

As Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict saw it, the historical developments touched off by modernity began to coalesce into “racism” in its modern form in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The raw material of “racism,” of course, had been around for centuries in the form of parochial fears of the outsider, fragments of folktales from faraway places, and scraps of stories inherited from the past and handed down through generations. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, these shards and fragments were assembled into a new mosaic with tools provided by scientists and other scholars—who, of course, were then inventing new concepts with which to analyze the world. But, this process did not unfold

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<sup>33</sup> This turn away from the facile assumptions of the ameliorative effects of modernity consonant with wider return to the irrational as a topic in Euro-American social thought in the 1920s.

out of scientific or scholarly impulses. The driving force behind the synthesis of coherent racial myths came from the political conflicts that marred the era. In particular, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict tied the creation of racism to the crisis of political legitimacy in post-Napoleonic France, to the challenges of Abolitionism in the American South, and to other conflicts between the forces of ‘Progress’ and ‘Reaction.’ This was a fairly formalistic, even literal definition of “racism,” but it was nonetheless highly insightful insofar as it turned attention to the *process* of synthesizing ideas about race into coherent stories, and to the interests that came to bear on that process.

No ideological weapon was wielded as often or as effectively by 19<sup>th</sup> century racist intellectuals as the “Nordic Race,” the precursor to what Seligmann called the Nazi “Nordidiocy.” A legend of a people whose origins in the forests of northern Europe endowed them with a host of special racial traits, the “Nordic Myth” stalked medieval Europe for centuries. The fragments of this myth could be traced back to *Germania*, the *ur-text* of both the “Nordic race”—and of “race-thinking” itself—first set to page near the turn of the second century A.D. According to its author, Tacitus, a Roman “traveler, historian ...moralist,” and “embittered foe of Imperial tyranny,” the Nordics were “an indigenous race; they are virtuous, individualistic, freedom-loving, and jealous of their racial purity; physically they are tall and blonde, brave and tough, they live frugally and are adventurous rather than toilsome.”<sup>34</sup> As Radin highlighted—with no small degree of irony—Tacitus’s travels certainly told him that the Germans were actually “an uncouth tribe of barbarians” not unlike “hundreds of other primitive tribes in many parts of the world.” Yet, he “credited them with traits that he wished to emphasize in his denunciations of his own times and his own people,” the licentious and profligate

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<sup>34</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 28.

Roman elite, busy hastening the Roman Republic's degeneration into Empire.<sup>35</sup>

Although originally articulated by a Roman Cassandra, the “Nordic Myth” assumed its modern significance only when rediscovered in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, at which point it was exhumed from the subterranean depths of European culture, dusted off, and dressed up as a *causus belli* in the political class conflicts that had erupted across Europe. By combining “physical criteria, mental qualities, and an implied or expressed superiority,” Barzun wrote, Tacitus’s “systematic and politically pointed” tract served as the “model of all political race-theories.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, “[r]acism was first formulated in the conflicts between the classes,” as Benedict bluntly put the matter, “directed by the aristocracy against the populace.”<sup>37</sup> Beginning in post-Napoleonic France, with the titanic struggles between the new liberal bourgeoisie, the masses, and hastily reassembled fragments of the *ancien regime*, racism became an irresistible bludgeon with which to assert political legitimacy while battering rivals. Barzun, well attuned to the historical nuances of the French political scene for reasons both professional and patriotic, recounted how revanchist aristocrats began to cast themselves as “Franks” after the fall of Napoleon, much as the pre-Revolutionary aristocrats did, marking themselves as the modern descendants of the ancient Nordic conquerors of the “Gallo-Romans” plebes, and setting their claims to political authority on grounds of racial superiority.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, in the intense heat of the power struggles that wracked Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, “racism” was forged out of fragments of folktales into a conservative, anti-

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<sup>35</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 136.

humanist political weapon. Barzun noted that the ideological “task of the reactionary theorists consisted chiefly of showing that there is no such thing” as the “eighteenth-century rationalist concept of Man, in whom without distinction of rank, creed, or race, certain rights were inherent.”<sup>39</sup> In this, the idea that racial traits, inherited unchanged from ancient tribes, defined “the aristocracy, the middle, and the lower classes,” served perfectly as antidote to Revolutionary ideas of equality.<sup>40</sup> As this conflict spread across the Continent, and to England, it evolved into a new political order, one that pitted the “Catholic, conservative, frequently monarchical” forces of what would eventually be call ‘the Right’ against the “liberal, anticlerical,” and egalitarian forces of ‘the Left.’ And, while those on the Left had ample stores of Enlightenment thought at their disposal, the conflict created an almost insatiable demand for ideas and images and stories that supported the kind of hierarchical, backwards looking, and static vision of society to which those on the Right clung.

At its core, then, the work of creating racism was the work of reinterpretation, or more accurately, *mis-reinterpretation* of past ideas and events carved out for present-day purposes. Inventing racial myths was an act of intellectual violence performed to justify acts of political violence. Constructed from a volatile amalgam of early 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism and the emerging biological and ethnographic sciences, these racial reinterpretations began as the romantic lyricism and jocular claims to natural greatness of poets, but soon took on a more ominous cast. For instance, in the accounts of the long, 15<sup>th</sup> century frontier struggle between the Spanish and the Arabs written by Spanish nationalist historians in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Radin noted that “the sanguinary cruelty

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<sup>39</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-8

of Castile and Aragon... was reinterpreted as the stern, uncompromising valor and faith of a disinherited people struggling to regain its patrimony.” The “natural and possibly inevitable tendency for a people... to exclude from government those against whom they fought, was interpreted as a proud consciousness of their racial purity.”<sup>41</sup> While the real history showed that the political and economic fortunes of peoples and nations changed rapidly, and often at the whim of forces beyond the control of human agency, these acts of intellectual *legerdemain* remade contingent, short-lived, even accidental dominance into permanent *racial* superiority. History, Radin thought, implored humility; racial mythologizing encouraging only aggression and arrogance. The primary aim of anti-racist historical analyses, then, was to peel off such mythical misinterpretations.

By defining “racism” as an act of reinterpretation, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict assigned the pivotal role in the invention and dissemination racial myths to the class of modern-day mythmakers—the class of intellectuals. Of course, the intellectuals responsible for fashioning racism were drawn almost exclusively from the tier of second-rate writers, scholars, critics, and poets, those who made up for their deficits of talent by reinterpreting the *true* geniuses of ‘Civilization’ as paragons of a particular race. Seligmann, for one, called them “dilettantes”—“dilettantes” for whom “dogmatism” takes the place of truth.<sup>42</sup> The line of demarcation that separated the makers of real knowledge and culture on the one hand, from that class of *interpreters* who subsequently converted culture into such racial artifacts, on the other, ran through biology, anthropology, literature, and even art and literary criticism. But, more than the particular character of the ideas they produced, what ultimately marked off this class of

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<sup>41</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 20.

parasitic thinkers was their naked allegiance a narrow anti-humanist agenda rather than to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge for the sake of all humanity. As Seligman described, “those works which have been made the spearhead of the modern political attack on the unity of mankind, have been written by persons with axes—sometimes, often, executioners’ axes—to grind.”<sup>43</sup>

This class of myth-making intellectuals formed a natural alliance with the conservative political elite, creating a unified anti-humanist front—a kind of anti-Popular Front. While the intellectuals set about revising “all history... to accord with their inexorable hostility of the movements of human liberty, culture and the spirit which characterized European civilization before it became Balkanized,” the “racists,” as Seligmann called the political and economic elite, “appropriate in their entirety the anti-democratic, authoritarian utterances of these dilettantes” to advance their goals.<sup>44</sup> From the perspective of the elite, the benefits of this arrangement seemed obvious. But, what made intellectuals turn their backs on the traditions of the Enlightenment? What turned intellectuals into racialists, ‘axe-grinders,’ or shills for powerful interests? Certainly, part of the answer came from naked self-interest born of a patronage relationship. And, at least for Radin and Seligmann, part of it came from the ways in which the competitive, even aggressive tendencies of capitalism inevitably infected all phases of human life, including thought and culture. But, surely, there were deeper roots to this alliance.

Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict also posited that racist intellectuals possessed a complex of psychological traits that lent racial mythmaking an irresistible

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<sup>43</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

appeal. The psychological portrait of intellectuals that they composed—an image of the ‘racist white psyche’—emerged as a key recurring trope in their history of racism. “The irony of race-theories is that they arise almost invariably from a desire to mould others’ actions rather than to explain the facts,” Barzun thought. “From Tacitus to Gobineau the great racial ideas have come from disappointed men.” Originating “in despair,” he continued, “racialism is an alternative to madness for intelligent educated men balked in what they consider their legitimate ambitions.”<sup>45</sup> These were “intellectual vagabonds,” Seligmann declared, “embittered and dispossessed” and so taken up with a new, deeply anti-humanist spirit: “a ‘scientific’ attitude compounded of mysticism, the imperious *Ich*, hostility to measurement, [and] intolerance of diversity,” all of which they compressed into “a guide and apologia for the conquest of ‘inferior’ and ‘subhuman’ people constituting the remainder of the world.”<sup>46</sup> When Seligmann looked beneath their hostility and misanthropy he saw a searing “nihilism contemptuous of every hard-won value that has given mankind dignity and civilization its worth.”<sup>47</sup> But, Barzun sensed something else lurking behind their writings and “pathetic appeal[s]”: utopianism. Racism, he conjectured, “is a faith rooted in the consciousness of worth and confirmed by the Tertullian principle of *Certum est quia impossibile*”—‘it is certain because it is impossible.’<sup>48</sup> Although rough in outline, the profile of the racist intellectual displayed many of the same characteristics as a figure that would become increasingly familiar in the decade ahead, and whose ‘biography’ is the subject of chapter four, below: the “bigoted” or “authoritarian personality” type.

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<sup>45</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 284.

<sup>46</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 35, 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 284.

For these anti-racist intellectuals, no single person embodied both this dynamic and self-sustaining alliance between ideas and power, as well as the psychology of racial myth-making better than the French diplomat-turned-amateur-race-historian, Count Arthur de Gobineau. Born in 1816, Gobineau considered himself a Nordic, by which he meant that he hailed from an ancient transnational elite, the members of which had once populated the royalty of all of the nations of Europe, but which by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had entered a period of steep and inevitable decline. As an aristocrat and a diplomat, witnessing first hand the declining authority of his class across the Continent, he was certainly a “disappointed man.” Yet, at the same time, he was able to brilliantly synthesize still-nascent biological notions of race with long-held fears of cultural mixing into a new totalizing theory of Europe’s crises. With his “pitiless reiteration of the term Aryan-Germanic,” Barzun thought, Gobineau “dinned into the minds of his contemporaries” ideas of “inferior and superior races, race-mixture, degenerescence, semitization, and nigrization,” making him “the most comprehensive expounder of a myth now become a living reality to nine-tenths of the world.”<sup>49</sup> The “Nordic Race,” Gobineau submitted, had mongrelized itself out of existence, thereby stripping European civilization of its vitality. None of the Boasians missed the irony that Gobineau, whose *Essay on the Inequality of the Races* was more a dirge than a celebration, and who disdained nationalism as an affront to borderless natural authority of his native-Nordic race, ultimately become a patron saint in the cause of German racial nationalism. But, as they pointed out, just as Gobineau had deployed Tacitus to make his case for racial history in the 1830s, so too did the Nazis use him for their own claims at legitimacy.

Of course, this alliance between intellectuals, political elites and economic

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<sup>49</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 108-9.



interests did not prevail only in Europe, and was not limited to the “Nordic Myth.” Radin, Barzun, and Benedict noted, with varying degrees of emphasis, that the early 19<sup>th</sup> century also bore witness to a second outbreak of racial mythologizing, one that remained segregated to the United States, and particularly the American South. Although Radin, Benedict and Barzun each took measure of the development of racial myths about “the Negro,” the enslavement of Africans remained on the periphery of the history of racial mythmaking. It was Herbert Seligmann’s career as an activist for Negro civil rights that made him acutely conscious of anti-black prejudice and the role of racial myths in sustaining it. Given the impending threat of Nazism, and the long-standing relegation of the “Negro Problem” to the margins of American social thought, it is hardly surprising that only the dedicated civil rights activist would tackle the myths about “the Negro” head on, even as his peers agreed that the same process of racial mythmaking shaped the status of African Americans and other colonial peoples.

Seligmann acknowledged that slavery was indeed an ancient institution, one through which virtually every great civilization passed, but that only in the West was it made into a “system” under the combined influence of “the joint stock company” and the opening of new “opportunities for exploitation in the New World.”<sup>50</sup> Out of this convergence developed “one of the first large-scale industries of the world, the slave trade.” In defense of this emerging system of New World slavery, and later, colonialism, those “layman” and “clergymen” dependent the slaveholder oligarchy “lent their voices, their authority and their pens to declarations that the Negro was not human”—the origin racial myths about the Negro.<sup>51</sup> “The application of racial theory to the system” of

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<sup>50</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

slavery reached its apotheosis in the decades preceding the American Civil War, Seligmann thought, when men like John C. Calhoun began to evoke the physical anthropologist Samuel George Morton's 1844 *Crania Aegyptiaca* to argue against abolitionism.<sup>52</sup> Here, then, Seligmann noted, almost 100 years in anticipation of the Third Reich appeared a deployment of anthropology "in exact accord with Nazi racist doctrines of today."<sup>53</sup>

Seligmann surmised that, as evidenced by the confluence of science and apologetics, racial doctrine and racial domination had a mutually constituting relationship. Indeed, by tearing away any pretense that ideas of race belonged the realm of science, he exposed the deeper linkages between racism and all ideologies of domination. As Seligmann laid out, "There is more than a historical connection between doctrines of racial inferiority and superiority," on the one hand, "and the social and political creeds which tend to subordinate entire groups of mankind on the basis of superficial distinctions." Indeed, the latter seemed to call forth the former out of necessity. "Without the *deus ex machina*" of racism, Seligmann submitted, "there can be no human justification for enslavement," or any of the subsequent manifestations of racial domination and exploitation, "and the role of force must be seen in all its crude brutality for what it is."<sup>54</sup> But, as important as the "*deus*"—the 'ghost,' the doctrine of racism—surely was, it was the machine itself, "the machine of the slaver mentality," the machine that enacted the "crude brutality" against fellow humans to satisfy its own greed and lusts for power, which drove the world toward its present-day crisis. Here, then, was an image of "the racist white psyche" as a machine, bent on domination,

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<sup>52</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-1.

possessed by a ghost of racism.

Reflecting a deeper insight he shared with the other anti-racist intellectuals, Seligmann posited that, over time, the slavery system ultimately manifested itself in a much broader culture and psychology of the American South. Born of the “slavery tradition” and its attendant psychology of “slave-owner attitude[s],” the racial myths of the South “affected personal, social and political attitudes; has been reflected in fiction, motion pictures, the press; and has invaded works pretending to represent the scientific spirit.”<sup>55</sup> Of course, this psycho-cultural complex did not form only in the U.S. Similar systems, Seligmann wrote, “like the British exploiting caste dominance in India and Africa,” became “fortified by the emotions which cluster about security, well-being, the sense of personal and group superiority,” effectively blurring the line between the actual slave masters and the other white members of society. Little wonder, then, that the Civil War evinced so “many of the elements of a holy war.” Revealing a sense of foreboding as to the end-game of colonialism, as well as an underlying humanist sensibility, Seligmann’s recognition that only the massive fusillade of Union bullets settled the question of slavery led him to opine that such racial systems “often require man-made convulsions in order to permit more general considerations to become dominant.”<sup>56</sup>

Seligmann used his analysis of slavery to show how the psychology of “racism,” once ingrained, became self-sustaining. Predicated on their domination of other races, whites, he thought, developed a psycho-social complex about race that both “produced the ‘strength and virulence of Western race-thinking in our time,’” as well as became a motivating factor in maintaining racial domination above and beyond its material

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<sup>55</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 155.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

benefits.<sup>57</sup> Inevitably, dominant whites abused their darker subjects, but in doing so they also activated a core mechanism of Freudian social psychology; such people were “haunted by a perpetual fear that some day the positions might be reversed; that... the Man of Color [may] establish an ascendancy of his own over the White Man,” and rain down upon whites that which they deserved.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, this interpretation echoed John Dollard’s analysis of the southern white psyche, but Seligmann also extended this line of analysis another step. Besides inciting fear of retribution, the belief among white people in their own racial superiority created an insatiable need to *see* that superiority manifested in both social conditions, and also in cultural achievement. Because the fruits of ‘Civilization,’ the fruits of modernity, served as the evidence of white racial genius, they *had* to remain under white control. As history showed, thought Seligmann, such achievements had no such racial provenance, and promiscuous cultural exchange had been and remained the hallmark of humanity. Further, whenever given half a chance, subject peoples proved themselves just as capable as whites, appropriating the trappings of ‘Civilization.’ To satisfy their racial conceit, monopolize tokens of modernity, and drive off their jealousy and fear of competition, whites resorted to enslavement, exploitation, and War—resulting, naturally, in greater fear of retaliation.<sup>59</sup> More broadly, then, Seligmann’s analysis of psychology of racism also resonated with a longer-standing notion about the untenable politics of white supremacy in a rapidly globalizing world. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, both racist and anti-racist intellectuals had pointed to the problem

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<sup>57</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 161. He quoted liberally from the work of (interestingly enough) the conservative British historian Alfred Toynbee. The history of *conservative* opposition to racism, including Eric Voeglin, remains wholly unexplored.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 161, 167.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

posed by the raw demographics of race, namely that whites constituted only a small minority of the world's population. As the 'tide of color' continued to rise across the globe, white supremacy was destined for collapse. In this guise, understanding—and breaking—this 'viscous circle' of the psychology of white racial prejudice, took on new, world-historical significance.

Echoed in Radin's, Benedict's, and Barzun's work, these twinned ideas about the fear of racial revenge and the need for racial vindication represented profound insights into the psychology of white racism. Both became parts of the liberal repertoire of analytical tools for understanding racism and both suggested how racial myths created by self-interested elites resonated with common people. But these ideas also reveal the limits of the liberal anti-racism. While these anti-racist intellectuals saw that the "man-made convolutions" necessary to overturn European domination of Africa were yet to come, they relegated America's reckoning with its racial domination of Africans to the past—to the Civil War. They saw the undeniable oppression levied against the American Negro in their own time as a not-yet-dead legacy of America's slave past: American race prejudice represented a kind of cultural lag, a tradition and psychological hold-over that persisted because of its political utility, but otherwise lacked material bases. Ultimately, this interpretation—more implicit than openly argued—marked the difference between the liberal anti-racism of these intellectuals and the largely parallel, but more incisive work of their radical contemporaries.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> In particular, I have in mind here juxtaposing their work with that of W.E.B DuBois's *Black Reconstruction in America* (1934) and Ralph Bunch's *A Worldview of Race* (1936), two contemporaneous efforts to sketch out the history of "racism," but ones that use the practice of racial domination carry the narrative workload. Both DuBois and Bunche speculate on the psychology of white racism—as DuBois had done throughout his life—but what separated them from the liberal anti-racists I focus on here was that they saw how racial domination in the U.S. was not just a residue from its slavery past, but still had material

According to the new anti-racist narrative of history, the development of racism took a crucial turn in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence to two broader intellectual and historical developments. The first of these was the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, and more importantly, the subsequent translation of Darwin's theory to the problem of racial conflict. Put briefly, Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict held that race-obsessed intellectuals seized on Darwin's book to give their conceptions of race and racial conflict scientific credibility and greater permanence. Darwinism, quite literally, animated the older Enlightenment impulse for classification, changing the long-held belief in racial differences into a full-blown, dynamic theory that such differences were the result of inter-racial competition stretching back to the dawn of humanity, and that the present racial order of the world—white supremacy—was ordained by nature itself. By reinforcing the credibility of a racial interpretation of evolution, the publication of *Origin* coincided with the rise of scientific authority after the 1850s, a development of which racial sloganeers took full advantage.

The advent of racial Darwinism preformed a kind of intellectual alchemy on late 19<sup>th</sup> century “race-thinking,” crystallizing even the most inchoate ideas about race into seemingly demonstrable typology of racial groups. As Barzun sketched with characteristic thoroughness, this racial reconfiguration cut a wide swath through much of contemporary intellectual life. For example, dating back “to the birth of the new science of philology in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century,” scholars puzzled over the similarities and differences among the various languages of Europe, with pioneering geniuses positing

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political and economic bases down to the present. White racism was not only inherited, but was also actively produced by the on-going benefits of racial domination.

that most of the major language groups evolved from a single primordial tongue—a derivative of Sanskrit they call “Aryan.”<sup>61</sup> Whatever the scholarly merit of the idea of an ‘Aryan’ language, once seized upon by intellectuals lacking any real loyalty to truth, and run through the logic of racial Darwinism, this idea became the basis for a primordial Aryan *race* which spoke that tongue, and which had at one time conquered all of Europe. “Abetted” by “political hatred” between the nations, skull-measuring anthropologists took hold of the idea of an Aryan race by the 1880s, and set out confidently in search of the Aryan roots of their own peoples.<sup>62</sup> So, with a wave of his magic wand, the race-scientist changed dead languages into living races.

But, as was the case at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the intellectual changes involved in the creation of racism were driven by deeper social and political forces, namely the birth and spread of modern political nationalism. As Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict saw it, the rise of nationalism—the “juggernaut before which all lesser causes became unimportant”—effectively reversed the polarity of racial myth-making. If, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, racism was mobilized on behalf of ruling classes across Europe as a means of legitimating their claims to power, by the second half of the century it had become of tool to actively suppress internal conflicts for the purpose of advancing nationalist goals. Of course, as Benedict in particular noted, “If pure racial heredity for a class in modern Europe... was an impossible claim, pure racial heredity for a nation was a fantastic one.”<sup>63</sup> But, “Racism” was just such a fantastic idea that proved useful as “a national battle cry in this era of nationalism,” she wrote, equally adaptable to suppressing internal dissent, rationalizing expansive national ambitions, and

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<sup>61</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 135-8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>63</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 200.

salving nationalist wounds inflicted by ‘savage’ invaders.<sup>64</sup> Both in Europe and in the US, as the rise of nationalism fueled the drive for imperial conquest, the universal Darwinian conclusion “that the whites as a whole are superior to blacks as a whole” proved no less amenable.<sup>65</sup>

Despite this shift, the essential alliance between racist intellectuals and political and economic elites remained little changed. Succinctly summarizing this dynamic, Radin concluded that “Nationalism and racialism were by-products of an economic order, given shape and respectability by romantic intellectuals and poets, . . . and used realistically and cynically by politicians and merchants.”<sup>66</sup> The work of planting national identity in racial soil proved easy enough. As Radin noted, under the influence of 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist competition, mythmakers increasingly argued that greatness was inherent “in the science, literature, art, music, [and] language of a nation.” From here, it was but a short leap to the idea that such greatness stemmed from “the physical traits of the people themselves and the land in which they lived.”<sup>67</sup> Through this process of cultivation, carried out by the “poets and professors”—after all, Radin thought, “One does not hear peasants waning eloquent in this way about the soil upon which they and their forefathers have toiled for untold generations”—“a formidable list of specific national virtues was drawn up which were supposed to have held true from the beginning of their history and to have found expression in every phase of their life.”<sup>68</sup> As Benedict put the matter with her characteristic jauntiness, “Racism in its nationalistic

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<sup>64</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 201.

<sup>65</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 173.

<sup>66</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 94

<sup>67</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 89.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



phase... has been the politicians' plaything."<sup>69</sup>

What drove this shift from class to nation was the spread of mass democracy across the Continent through the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whether knitting together diverse communities, quashing opposition movements, facilitating industrial development, or justifying imperial expansion, the work of national consolidation provoked no small measure of popular resistance. Racism proved invaluable as a tool for either winning the allegiance or suppressing the dissent of the masses. Registering the historical irony, Barzun noted that virtually every one of the spate of nationalist histories written during the period deployed the same "Nordic Myth" as their bases—"to strengthen the movement toward national unification" in both Germany and Italy, for instance, or in Great Britain, where the "corresponding movement toward 'Saxonism'" linked "the English gift for self-government" to the "racial heritage" of the "Nordic tribes" which had conquered the Isles almost a millennia earlier.<sup>70</sup> Because race "is a living symbol for ideas and principles," and therefore "useful propaganda for keeping one's own followers conscious of their worth," the "value of historical essays on racial principles is to persuade the 'Nordics' themselves that they have a great past, encourage them to feel superior, and justify their attack on a neighboring group."<sup>71</sup> Such "racial history" as Barzun quoted, served as the "democratic form of dynastic history," with racial myths evolving into weapons to win popular support.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately, this exact same fusion of racial Darwinism with political nationalism also gave rise to the scourge of Anti-Semitism in its modern form. As Barzun made the

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<sup>69</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 138.

<sup>70</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 35, 46-7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-8.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

case, Jews were converted from a religious group into the ‘Semitic race’ by the same alchemical reaction that turned the ancient Aryan language into a superior race of conquering whites. But, where “Aryan” became the foundation for explicitly national identity, “Semite” took shape in opposition; “as *national* enmities in Europe became sharper over time, all *international* groups or ideas became suspect in the eyes of ardent patriots,” marking Catholics, freemasons, socialists, and of course Jews as “the ‘alien in our midst.’”<sup>73</sup> In response, “most of the defenders of the ‘Semite’ have accepted the race-epithet and sought rather to glorify it than to deny the meaningless community of blood,” thereby strengthening with science the “irrational bonds that had been forged during the Middle Ages” under the influence of religion.<sup>74</sup> Given the facile nature of “race-thinking”—where association supplants causation, and contradictions abound without dissonance—self-proclaimed defenders against “the overthrow of Aryan culture” could hardly resist connecting the Jewish racial trait of “‘scheming’” to the work of anarchists, international financiers, and the proletariat. Karl Marx, after all, *was* a Jew.<sup>75</sup>

The fusion of nationalism with racism also neutralized the anti-racist, anti-nationalist resistance movements of the period. As Barzun pointed out, “liberals and socialists” throughout Europe “harbored [their own] race-prejudices,” the former sublimating their “race-antagonisms by discriminating against individual artists or thinkers,” while the latter, “compelled to love his European brothers, indulged his animus against the yellow and black proletarian who competed unfairly against him ten

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<sup>73</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 147. Italics added

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. Interestingly, Barzun traced out a similar history for the “Celtic” race, which also enjoyed quite a vogue in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, on even more dubious grounds than the “Semite” or the “Aryan.”

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

thousand miles away by accepting lower wages and longer working hours.” And yet, Barzun noted, though not insignificant, the self-inflicted limitations such opposition efforts labored under paled in comparison to the unrelenting “race-hatred” and demands for “race-solidarity” enforced by racialist “fanatics of all complexions.” Mobilized around this racial “xenophobia,” “conservative and reactionary ranks in all countries” not only attacked “foreign things [as] foreign,” but they also attacked anything they disapproved of at home as something “foreign,” regardless of its provenance. Branded with “words of opprobrium” like “foreign, alien, outsider” by this kind of “race-thinking,” “liberals and radicals... were too often suspected of disloyalty to their homeland for them to risk compromising their internal policies by tilting against the Protean myth of race.”<sup>76</sup> Rendered suspect and powerless in the face of what racial myths had to offer such a despondent people, the champions of cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and the ‘rights of man’ beat a hasty retreat.

Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict thought that not only did racism prove indispensable as a tool for constructing a national consciousness out of disparate peoples, but that it also provided a crucial means of managing the psychological needs that inevitably flowed from national identity. The logic and power of racism became particularly apparent through the unfolding of the paramount racial-nationalist conflict of the period, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. The outcome of the contest signaled both the decline of France from its brief mid-century ascendance to Continental prominence, as well as the arrival of newly consolidated German state to Great Power status. From amongst the humiliated “‘Generation of ‘70’” in France emerged a host of reactionary intellectuals who, “economically or psychologically injured” by defeat,

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<sup>76</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 199-201.

immediately began cloak their “vituperative chauvinism” in the vestments of “Latin” racial heritage, thereby recasting that defeat as a recapitulation of the sacking of Rome by the German barbarian-invaders.<sup>77</sup> “As for the masses of unthinking readers,” Barzun noted, “racial anti-Germanism... acted as a comforting drug in a period of greater and greater insecurity.” “By providing an inherent unchanging ground for contempt, race served better than any other notion to relieve the fury of impotence” in France, “where national weakness and isolation remained a psychological fact.” “Organized by interested groups,” the “herd-responses” of the masses “found a vent” for their “economic... [and] political frustration... in the wholesale insulting of ‘enemy’ nations.” “The sense of collective inferiority and its compensatory animus” that overcame France demanded “reassurance about [France’s] own importance in the world, and a comforting faith that should place her on good terms with herself.”<sup>78</sup>

As the victors in this particular contest, and citizens of the undisputed rising power of the last decades of the century, Germans developed a different psychodynamic with their myths of race, one rooted in Germany’s particular history, culture, path to national greatness, and status within Europe. As Radin surmised, because the Germans held themselves apart from Europe until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German national psyche developed an inferiority complex so strong that none of its subsequent cultural and technological advances, no matter how remarkable, performed the necessary psychological compensation. Drawing straight from the ideas of psychologist Alfred Adler—Radin provided one the first English translations of Adler’s work, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* in 1925—Radin conjectured

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<sup>77</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 193.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

that the extent to which Nordic mythmaking thrived in Germany through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century indicated “only too clearly that specific emotional factors were at work, that we are dealing here with the gratification of a long-postponed wish fulfillment, with the illusion of confused late comers attempting to participate in something that they had always rejected... but which they were now prepared to accept.”<sup>79</sup> “Like egoists,” he continued, “they became children and poor sports, and instead of acknowledging their conversion they turned the spit around and tried to prove that they were actually the creators of what they had so consistently rejected.”<sup>80</sup> The Nordic myth, then, offering up a vision of racial superiority and purity extending back more than a millennia, tapped into the “*parvenu*” desire to believe that one’s own achievements have been won unaided, and served as “the compensation dream of confused latecomers.”<sup>81</sup>

These anti-racist intellectuals saw the Great War as the moment when the means of manufacturing racial myths fell into perfect alignment with both the psychic needs of the downtrodden masses as well as the narrow desires of the European elite for self-aggrandizement. Indeed, it was the resulting synthesis that made the War so different in its scope and destructive power. By substituting “a hucksters cry for a true poet’s intuition,” Radin claimed, and creating living racial symbols with which to rally the people, the poets, artists, and intellectuals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century unduly “gave a false ennoblement to [the] racial arrogance” which drove European imperial ambitions. “They but aided the politicians and professors to create their figures of the earth with the lineaments of a Glorified John Bull, Marianne, Germania, and Uncle Sam.”<sup>82</sup> The variety

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<sup>79</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 44-5

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-51.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

of nationalist conflicts that flared during the 19th century made for a number of cross-cutting racial alliances. As such, the onset of hostilities against the Germans and their *Kultur* required “a revaluation of all the race-values,” as Barzun called it. But, “the shock of mobilization” made such “rearrangement of race-ideas... amazingly swift and smooth,” after which the “the Allies represented the civilized West,” and the Central Powers became “Mongols,” “explicitly identical” to the “Yellow Peril” from the East.<sup>83</sup> Of course, behind this revaluation, Barzun thought, laid the popular “yearning for some kind of idealism to cover the reality of the struggle.”<sup>84</sup>

For all of the destruction wrought by racial myths, the War’s terrible aftermath only strengthened their hold on the Great Powers, both victorious and defeated. Barzun thought that the “‘idealism’ of the War had emphasized for both sides the inhumanity, the alien-ness, the racial difference of the other side,” and that “the habits engendered by war led to a cult of energy and struggle which stressed group conflict as useful.”<sup>85</sup> These habits proved contagious, shaping the various competing claims of territorial greed touched off by the treaty process into calls for self-determination predicated on race. Not even the Atlantic Ocean, Barzun noted, proved wide enough to stop the spread of this renewed race-antipathy, giving rise to the second Ku Klux Klan in the United States that was “anti-Japanese in the northwest, anti-Negro in the South, and against foreigners, radicals and Catholics everywhere else.”<sup>86</sup> Neither “the combination of antagonisms” visible during the 1920s, “nor the hypocrisy of the race-doctrine” was new, Barzun thought, “but its recurrence after the War [was] characteristic of an era of suspicion,

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<sup>83</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 237.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

insecurity, and explosive touchiness thinly veneered with heroics and talk of self-sacrifice.”<sup>87</sup> Whatever the local factors at play, “the truth of the matter is that in the modern world, real or supposed feuds apparently cannot be carried out on their own terms,” but must instead be expressed in the language of race.<sup>88</sup>

As these anti-racist intellectuals saw it, a consistent political, economic, and intellectual dynamic animated the history of racial mythmaking. Following a common, Popular Front-inspired pattern, they wrote this history as one of conservative, anti-democratic elites employing anti-humanist intellectuals to legitimate their anti-social interests. The power of racial myths, in this telling, stemmed from their capacity as a protean cultural formation to satisfy a range of psychological needs or desires in the minds of everyday people, and thereby to bind people together in racial solidarity. As victims of the predations of elites, the sweep of large social forces, or the contingent reversals of history, people found in racial mythologies a mix of psychological rewards. Racism provided psychic compensation for social loss, emotionally fulfilling explanations of who deserved the blame for their lot, useful rationalizations for permanent domination of other groups, and hopeful stories about past and future greatness.

So conceived, their analysis offered penetrating insights into the symbolic power that “race” held in the imagination of white people. ‘The racist white psyche,’ in their rendering, drew much psychological comfort from racial myths. But, by relegating the practical, material benefits of racial domination to the political and economic elites—failing to build on Dollard’s insight that psychological and material “gains” reinforced

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<sup>87</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 255.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

each other—they also created an intellectual blind spot right in the center of their social vision. And, as chapter three and four will demonstrate, this blind spot would prove exceedingly difficult to expose. Driven by the desire to rescue the possibility of a multi-racial democracy, and guided by the sense the masses of white American (and Europeans) were themselves victims of elite avarice and hunger for power, Benedict, Barzun, Seligmann and Radin found an image of ‘the racist white psyche’ that satisfied their complex intellectual mandates.

### ***Racism in the Modern World***

Radin, Barzun, Seligmann, and Benedict took to writing the history of racism as a means of diagnosing “the epidemic of racism,” as Benedict called it, spreading across the globe during the 1930s. In the continuities and discontinuities between the present moment and the longer sweep of their version of Western history, they hoped to glean some insight into the concatenating crises of decade. Obviously, they used their histories of racism to make sense of Nazism, to show that the rise of Hitler atop a wave of racial arrogance and hate was essentially contiguous with a longer historical development. More than just locating the place of Nazism in flow of the history of racism, though, they wanted to understand the significance of the moment they were living through in the broader historical sweep of civilization itself. As Seligmann stated the case, they all believed that Nazism was only a symptom—a “symptom of a sickness that is sweeping through the masses of mankind.”<sup>89</sup> Here, then, in trying to locate the causes of this deeper sickness, emerged the real significance of the broader history of humanity’s relationship to racism.

From the outset, with its epicenter in Nazi Germany, the “epidemic of racism”

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<sup>89</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 35-6.



that spread around the world in the 1930s appeared as the apotheosis of the nationalistic form of “racism” born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>90</sup> “Embittered and dispossessed” after the humiliations of Versailles, and overcome by “compensatory animus,” most of Germany’s “intellectual vagabonds” gave themselves over to the worship of “Aryanism.” By twisting a century’s worth of natural science, philology, and history, they created an image of the pure German Aryan, a mixture of the “Nordic Myth” with both “Puritanism” and “pagan religiosity.”<sup>91</sup> (Having lost their moorings, those same intellectuals later found ancient blood connections between the Aryans, the Italians, and even the Japanese.)<sup>92</sup> These ideas and images found fertile soil, as Germany’s fall from global power to defeated supplicant during the 1920s touched off a host of cultural and psychological compensation mechanisms, visible in the “pathological vulgarity” of Nazi “racial bragging,” their “shameless self-adulation and falsification.”<sup>93</sup> In deploying a revamped Nordic myth as psychic compensation and as goad to aggressive militarism, “the speeches of Hitler and Goebbels” “welded together” “race, culture and political action... and forged [them] into a lever of national uplift.”<sup>94</sup>

And, while Aryanism served to whip the populace into a frenzy of incipient violence, anti-Semitism worked to give that frenzy direction. In the “pornographic falsifications of Nazi hate mongers,” the image of ‘the Jew’ “appeared in its characteristic function of lightning-rod to carry off the dangerous charges accumulated by misgovernment, demagoguery and reaction.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, the Nazis managed to

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<sup>90</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 284.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>92</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 216.

<sup>93</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 250-1; 253.

<sup>95</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 201; 203.

turn “What was once a partly subconscious impulse to burden a scapegoat with mankind’s inner tensions” into an explicit instrument of state policy. Of course, the methods of anti-Semitism had clear historic precedent: “Whether it be confiscation of property, torture, and murder of children, the spreading of malignant falsehood, or the cultivation of depravity,” “the prototype for Nazi thought and activities” came from the Medieval Church and its dogmas, which Nazi scientists simply reconfigured along racial lines.<sup>96</sup> And, much as the Church did in its own right, the Nazis used anti-Semitism to crush the still nascent German democracy, and to “justify robbery as a means of replenishing the... bankrupt Nazi treasury.”<sup>97</sup> In either case, the essential dynamic of racism remained the same—a power hungry economic and political elite deploying “racism” to manipulate a beleaguered public.

But, beneath even these ostensible purposes, Seligmann for one saw something more sinister. He thought that the old “slaveholder attitudes [were] again becoming manifest in the Nazi-fascist dictatorships,” with their doctrines of racial superiority and inferiority serving as “a necessary preliminary to the imposition of force and enslavement” over the entire world.<sup>98</sup> By connecting the treatment of minorities, the threat to democracy, and the specter of slavery together through the embodied form of the “Nazi-fascist,” Seligmann exemplified the intellectual work at the heart of each of these anti-racist tracts. He identified anti-Semitism as a political weapon for Hitler’s imperial ambitions—as “the foremost instrument everywhere of Nazi-fascist penetration” abroad. Spread through agents, propaganda, and rumor-mongering, Seligmann thought, Nazis used anti-Jewish hatred and suspicion to foment internal strife

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<sup>96</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 201.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-8

and discredit democracy in neighboring countries, softening their will to resist coming invasions. Like a knife held against the taught sinews of a civilization straining at all its joints, Nazi anti-Semitism threatened to sever the tenuous connections holding societies together well beyond Germany's ever-swelling borders. In making these connections, Seligmann was not trying to rally those people who identified with anti-slavery sentiment to take up the cause of anti-fascism; after all, such people probably needed little convincing. Rather, he was trying to expand the scope of anti-fascist feeling to include *all forms of the disease* inflicting Germany, the disease of "racism." Through these connections, he tried to show that opposing Nazism was tantamount to standing against all forms of "racism."

Of course, the cause of Seligmann's alarm was his sense, shared with Radin, Barzun, and Benedict, that the allure of "racism" was not limited to Germany, and not even to those nations with visible fascist movements. As Barzun put it, although "the Third Reich has become the most blatant apostle of racialism in the modern world, [sic] the movement has deeper roots than that regime."<sup>99</sup> Indeed, those roots stretched across Western civilization. "The only difference," Barzun noted, between Nazi Germany and the other Western nations was "that no other government had yet gone so far as the Nazi régime in adopting race as a popular slogan, despite its obvious value as a means of diverting attention from economic problems and as a satisfaction of the ever-latent zest to persecute."<sup>100</sup> "Read attentively," "the press and the political literature not only of England, France, Italy, and the United States, but also of Mexico, Turkey, Rumania, and Scandinavia" revealed the same kind of race-thinking which gave rise to the Third

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<sup>99</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Reich.<sup>101</sup> Replete with inferences that “the whites are unquestionably superior to the colored races; that the Asiatic Peril is a race-peril; that the Japanese of late seem to have become very yellow indeed, so much so that the Chinese seem to have become white brothers in comparison; that the great American problem is to keep the Anglo-Saxon race pure from the contamination of Negro (or Southern European, or Jewish) ‘blood,’” as well as countless of stories of “racial conflicts,” the world’s newspapers registered how far “racism” had spread.<sup>102</sup>

The proximate cause of this outbreak, of course, was the global Great Depression, and its psychological consequences. History showed that economic and political crises always rendered the masses vulnerable to the thrall of racial myths. During such moments, “the rational functions of human beings seem to abdicate,” and “the most contradictory theories and opinions may find home in the same embittered mind.”<sup>103</sup> The threat of precipitous loss of status or sustenance made people desperate, and once desperate, they could be “satisfied with a victim, and racism, [besides] telling them... that they are the heirs of the ages, ...pointed out to them... a degenerate breed to extirpate.”<sup>104</sup> As Seligmann put it, racial myths “ministered to all those desires and needs which have taken the form of... self-exaltation and defense against gnawing inferiority feelings.”<sup>105</sup> And, “one of the great political advantages of racist slogans is that the underprivileged,... the unemployed, and the low-income groups can vent, through this alleged racist ‘superiority,’ the hatred that is engendered by their fear and insecurity.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 235.

<sup>104</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 217

<sup>105</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 38.

<sup>106</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 246.

As such, racial myths inevitably came to serve as “part of the stock in trade of racists who pander to the sense of security and vanity of those who have no claim to dignity other than their feelings of superiority over [peoples] whose historic achievements and present endowment they are ignorant.”<sup>107</sup>

Seligmann’s depiction of the psychological work performed by racial myths in the contemporary world presaged a crucial turn anti-racist thinking about the nature of racial prejudice. Although, in his estimation, racial myths continued to minister to a host of psychological needs, they satiated one particular need more than others. Racism both identified individuals or groups that frustrated, defeated people could blame for their problems, as well as provided ample justification for attacking such targets. In doing so, racism served as the perfect handmaiden to the archaic impulse to “scapegoat” others for problems that defied easy explanation or solution. As chapter three will outline, the idea that white racial prejudice derived from the impulse to find a “scapegoat” emerged in the early 1940s as the dominant conception of the psychology of prejudice. Its maturation as an analytical frame for understanding the behavior of white people regarding racial minority groups signaled the arrival of anti-racist thinking into the mainstream of American intellectual life. At the same time, though, the development and dissemination of the concept of racial “scapegoating” also heralded the attenuation of the broader-reaching psychological theorizing that characterized Seligmann and company’s ‘psychic history’ of “mankind.”

But, when Radin, Barzun, Seligmann and Benedict took measure of the present outbreak of “racism” within the broader historical context they laid out, they thought that they were witnessing a true historical rupture. The depths of deprivation and despair

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<sup>107</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 174.

set off by the Depression, the speed with which “racism” spread around the world, the intensity of belief in racial myths—these all added up to suggest that Civilization itself had reached a turning point. As Radin put it, “The only conceivable interpretation is that this semblance of madness, this intensification of that old Teutonic virtue, the berserker rage, conceals something else—the last wild attempt to stave off the impending transformation of an economic system” so obviously coming unraveled around the world.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the failures of the world’s modern democratic nations to respond effectively to the unraveling of the economic system triggered a broad loss of faith in Civilization itself—in the idea of Progress, in science, and in the humanist tradition that grown and developed and expanded over the centuries. The proliferation of “nationalism, racism, war, prejudice, [and] hatred,” then, were all signs “of the sick feeling of helplessness that... threatens to overwhelm every human being” under such conditions.<sup>109</sup>

Radin, Barzun, Seligmann and Benedict had written of such an “impending transformation” before—at the dawn of the modern age, when intellectuals and elites began to create racial myths as a means to exploit the social disruptions that splintered the Medieval world. As they all went to some lengths to establish—indeed, what they all identified as their reason for writing about race in the first place—they thought that humanity was again poised at an inflection point in history. Clearly, the systems of capitalist production, Victorian morality, political nationalism, and racial imperialism had reached a point of crisis by the 1930s. As at that moment of modernity, the mythological world of race that had prevailed for so long was breaking up. “In the

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<sup>108</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 136.

<sup>109</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 231.

thirteenth century and in the sixteenth century, *as in the world today*,” Benedict wrote, “new economic and social necessities were starting new ferments” that fundamentally threatened the prevailing order.<sup>110</sup> By linking the 1930s to the birth of modernity, and the rise of Nazism to a deeper and more long-lived strain of “racism,” these anti-racist intellectuals raised the stakes of the Nazi threat beyond the immediate dangers of Hitler’s military aggression, or his active anti-Semitism. Nazism, the most reactionary cultural and political formation in history, signaled the death throes of the prevailing material and mythological world, and the onset of a truly epochal moment of change.

### ***The History of the Future***

The very act of identifying “racism” as central to the problems wracking the world in the 1930s revealed the true ideological thrust of the thinking of this collection of anti-racist intellectuals. In October of 1936, when Franklin Roosevelt stood before the Democratic National Convention gathered at Madison Square Garden to accept his party’s re-nomination as President—and to welcome the unanimous hatred of the “economic royalists” who had brought the nation and the world to its knees—he used the occasion to call out his roster of the forces imperiling “peace for the individual, peace for the community, peace for the Nation, and peace with the world.” Throwing the liberal gauntlet down at the feet of the “the old enemies of peace —business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering”—FDR declared himself, his party, and indeed, his nation for the struggle against such enemies.<sup>111</sup> Put succinctly, believing that “racism” played a pivotal role in shattering the “the peace of mankind,” these anti-racist intellectuals sought to stitch their

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<sup>110</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 230. Italics added.

<sup>111</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Speech at Madison Square Garden,” October 31, 1936. <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3307>. Accessed on April 11, 2011.

attacks on racist doctrines and their anti-racist ideology into the larger discourse of New Deal Liberalism.<sup>112</sup> They aimed to secure a place for anti-racism in the arsenal of liberal democracy.

Although racial doctrines certainly stimulated racial hatred, the real problem of “racism” stemmed not from “the natural facts of race” or some instinct of racial repulsion, as had been assumed for so long. “To understand race conflict we need fundamentally to understand *conflict* and not *race*,” Benedict wrote, meaning “that all the deep-seated causes of conflict in any group or between groups are involved in any outbreak of race prejudice.”<sup>113</sup> Although often couched by racists as “the problems of colored populations, of immigration and miscegenation, of [endemic] anti-Semitism and national hatred,” the “galling frictions” that fueled racism actually grew from “nationalistic rivalries, desperate defense of the status quo by haves, desperate attacks by have-nots, poverty, unemployment, war”—the very same conflicts identified by Roosevelt.<sup>114</sup> So defined, the idea of racism thoroughly eroded the grounds for liberal quiescence on the problems of race. To the extent that solving larger social problems fell to governments—the main tenet of New Deal liberalism—identifying those same problems as the well-spring of racial hatred loaded the state with responsibility for ameliorating the problems of racism as well. But, because the real danger of racism laid in its capacity to obscure the root causes of social injustice, conflict, and distress, this connection extended both ways. Not only was solving social problems essential to solving race problems, but because racism worked to mystify the causes underlying such problems, addressing racism became essential to solving the problems themselves.

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<sup>112</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 237.

<sup>114</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 276; Benedict, *Race*, 237-8.



But, just what did it mean for governments to address the problem of racism? Obviously, educating people about the “glories of Chinese civilizations or the scientific achievements of the Jews,” for instance, as well as the ‘gifts’ that immigrants and non-white peoples brought to America, the horrific consequences of racism run amok, and the possibilities of concerted amelioration of social problems had a central role. As Benedict in particular pointed out, however, enacting a program of anti-racist education “*instead of social engineering*” would yield “nothing but hypocrisy.”<sup>115</sup> Coming from a founding member of the Progressive Education Association, the most visible and active arm of the loose-knit cultural pluralism movement, Benedict’s admonishment against forgoing political action in favor of education carried special significance. Because attacking or oppressing minority groups was unjust in its own right, and also because prejudices against minority groups were the open wounds through which racism infected society, the *sine que non* of any such program had to begin with the aggressive defense of minority rights.

The protections of minority groups alone, though, would not suffice to prevent the spread of destabilizing racial myths through the body politic. “To minimize racial persecution, therefore, it is necessary to minimize the conditions which lead of persecution; it is not necessary to minimize race.” Besides legislating “human rights for the minorities,” Benedict continued, “the majorities—the persecutors—must have solid basis for confidence in their own opportunity to live in security and decency.” Without such ‘confidence,’ “whatever the laws, whatever the guarantees, they will find a victim... [to] sacrifice... as the scapegoat to their despair.”<sup>116</sup> “Until housing and

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<sup>115</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 255.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

conditions of labor are raised above the needlessly low standards which prevail in many sections of the country”—“until we have ‘made democracy work’ so that the nation’s full manpower is drafted for its common benefit”—racism will continue to prosper. In short, the solution to the race problem entailed the same social democratic reconstruction of the United States toward which the Popular Front had been pushing the New Deal. As they all recognized, “we are so far from doing this in the modern world that is likely to seem a program impossible of achievement.”<sup>117</sup> And yet, from the vantage point of late 1930s, as the task of securing “democratic opportunity for the privileged and for the underprivileged” seemed to become the overriding ethos in American political life, the prospects for victory over racism did not seem so terribly distant.<sup>118</sup>

As for intellectuals, it fell to them show the people not only that “racism” was in error, but also that it inflicted terrible costs on those who fell under its sway. As Radin wrote, like a disease, once racial myths infected a culture, they began to destroy both “those who believe in them [as well as] those who suffer from them.”<sup>119</sup> Wherever it gains dominance, Seligmann observed, the “corrosive and destroying plague” of racism “stamp[ed] out those elements in the human soul that respond to order and beauty.” By “systematically extirpating the sense of kinship and kind among men and women,” and by “exalting the impulses of self-assertion, envy, hatred, and mad isolation,” racism renders “the soul and the people who have succumbed” to it “insulated from and immune to the appeals of common humanity, of mercy, of brotherhood and

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<sup>117</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 245.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>119</sup> Radin, *The Racial Myth*, 136.

understanding.”<sup>120</sup> Racism, then, always created two sets of victims: those “sterilized... victims of dehumanization” who were bred “like wild beasts, starved and straining for ferocious attack” by elites deploying racial myths, on the one hand, and those who such ‘wild beasts’ “go on to crush, subjugate and ruin” because they have been cast as inferior.<sup>121</sup> Taking an anthropologist’s liberty to speak for and to the members of the culture to which she herself belonged, Benedict warned “If we are unwilling to or unable to pay the price of equality in human rights, we, the persecutors, suffer brutalization in ourselves whenever we fall into the trap set for us.”<sup>122</sup>

Beyond this, their task was more difficult, and difficult to measure. Undergirding this sense that their contemporary moment bore crucial resemblance to the onset of modernity laid an abiding faith that things could turn out differently. And, they themselves, anti-racist intellectuals, were the agents of that faith. This time, history could proceed along a different path because now *they* stood in the place where those scientists and scholars, hundreds of years ago, had refashioned European culture as a product of race, racial genius, and racial conflict. Unlike their racist nemeses, they knew better. They knew where racial myths came from. They knew the “protean power” that race held over people, the “mystical impulses” it satisfied, and the pain and suffering that such myths would sow.<sup>123</sup> And, they knew that during the epochal moments of the past, the dissenting, liberal and radical intellectuals, artists, and activists from whom they descended had not banded together tightly enough, had not been loud enough, clear enough, or numerous enough to conveying to the masses what was at

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<sup>120</sup> Seligmann, *Race Against Man*, 35-6.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-6.

<sup>122</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 242.

<sup>123</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 5.

stake. The mythological world of the present was shattering, and it would fall to *them* to build the new one. Their first act, carried out in *The Racial Myth, Race Against Man*, and the rest was to show the true social, cultural, and psychological consequences of humanity's enthrallment to racial myths. Believing that "racism" triumphed in part because it offered a compelling reinterpretation of history, they countered with their own reinterpretation of history. These books were first drafts of a new history of humanity, grounded humanity's collective—and hoped for—defeat of "racism."

This hope also led them back to the America. All of them were unabashed critics of the treatment of African Americans, of Nativism, of anti-Semitism, and of anti-Asian prejudice, and all of them drew explicit connections between European imperialism, Nazis, and American race problems. But, in the end, their hope rested on a sense that Americans could change, could implement the prescriptions necessary to solve the problems of racism. Part of this collective faith rested on the sense of the tolerant, adaptable nature of the American character. Part of it also rested on the thought that the reforms of the New Deal, by addressing the economic collapse with a democratic and technocratic overhaul of the capitalist system, would succeed in mitigating exactly those insecurities and fears that made racial myths so attractive in the first place. (This was a faith that, particularly in the case of Radin and Seligmann, extended to Soviet Russia—the betrayal of 1939 was still in the future—by virtue of its attacks on the material causes of racial conflict.) But, much of their faith rested on necessity alone. In a world permanently characterized, they thought, by ever increasing "contacts" between the races, "It is essential, if we are to live in this modern world, that we should understand

Racism and be able to judge its arguments.”<sup>124</sup> Indeed, with the threat of fascism looming in the West, the strength of Japan rising in the east, and racial tension growing across the country, they argued that “the history of the future depends on our stance on racism.”<sup>125</sup>

As an intellectual genre, a distinct line of anti-racist analysis, the histories of racism that Radin, Barzun, Seligmann and Benedict created produced a number of key insights into the nature of “race” as a social and cultural construction. Whatever the limits of their conceptual vision of racism, which were not inconsiderable, they did manage to tie together a sense of the powerful emotional impulses behind racial identity with the imperatives of political institutions and the interests of political and economic elites. And, they managed to see how this complex dynamic evolved through history in response to deeper structural changes in the political and economic order of European and American society. Their work represented a distinct advance of Franz Boas’s insights, first announced in the 1910s, that certain white “races,” namely the so-called Nordics, as well as their cousins, the Aryans and Teutonics, were essentially myths—the tools, if not the deliberate constructions, that elite groups used to advance own anti-democratic interests. But, rather than serving as a springboard for further thinking about the complex cultural, psychological, and material intersections of “race” through American and European history, this thirty-odd year long historical inquest into the making, dissemination, and use of specific doctrines of white supremacy turned moribund by the end of the 1940s. The reasons for this were complex, but do afford

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<sup>124</sup> Benedict, *Race*, 7.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

some insights into the interplay of ideas, political culture, and sheer historical contingency.

At the most basic level, the history of “racism” stopped because these historians of “racism” stopped telling it. As the horrors of Nazism were brought to light, Jacques Barzun turned his historical attention toward defending “Civilization” rather than drawing attention to its darker strains. Moreover, he spent much of the next four decades as an administrative steward of his beloved *alma mater*, Columbia. After more than twenty years of journalism and civil rights activism, Herbert Seligmann inexplicably disappeared into the world of poetry and literary criticism, and never again took up matters of race or “racism.” Paul Radin spent the 1940s teaching and writing at various universities around the country, and the world, but he lost much of his readership because of his radical politics. In contrast, in the decade after publishing *Race*, Ruth Benedict emerged as the preeminent American anti-racist intellectual, lending her name to countless committees and commissions called to advance the cause of racial and religious tolerance through education and community outreach. During the War and its immediate aftermath, her intellectual attentions were drawn toward the challenges of studying modern cultures, and toward using anthropological knowledge for the purposes of reconstructing a broken world. While she continued to lecture and write popular pieces on race issues, Benedict did not substantively develop her thinking about “racism” before her untimely death, in the fall of 1948—just a little more than five years after Boas’s demise.

That said, to judge by the proliferation of stories and articles published in leading periodicals and newspapers, shown on ‘newsreels,’ and broadcast by radio stations

across the U.S. attacking the Nazi “Aryan Myth,” the efforts of Radin, Seligmann, Barzun, and Benedict were a resounding success. To judge by the extent to which opposition to Nazism became linked to the wider phenomenon of “racism,” their efforts to lash the two together worked better than they could have imagined—though they benefited in this regard by the political savvy of their allies, particularly among the ranks of the more militant African American and Jewish organizations. And yet, they also witnessed a dramatic narrowing of their basic framework for analyzing racism—the wider historical, psychological and material framework they constructed for understanding racial mythmaking—down to an almost exclusive focus on the make-up of the ‘racist white psyche,’ and his actions. This development, of course, stemmed from the War, and the ways in which the needs of wartime mobilization shifted the focus of attention away from critique and culture change, and toward solving more immediate problems. In this context, their subtle, overlapping sense of the material and psychological bases of racial conflict and racial prejudice lacked the kind of programmatic direction demanded by the moment. For all their talk of epidemics and sickness, their cures were obscure and complicated.

Toward the end of his “study in modern superstition,” Barzun offered a brief glimpse of the kind of thinking that would find great demand within just a few years. In comparing the hatreds of “the extreme nationalist in France in Germany,” Barzun noted that “the thinking process, language, and activity of both men are precisely alike.” The similarity between these racials led Barzun to speculate that perhaps they represented a single type. “The facts,” he suggested, “would almost justify postulating a Chauvinist Race cutting across other classifications and differing markedly from the Cosmopolitan

Race.”<sup>126</sup> Barzun, like the rest, was a member of such a cosmopolitan “race.” And he knew it was not so much a race as a disparate collection of like-minded peoples “in many nations who have in the course of time established a cosmopolitan tradition.” This tradition was grounded by a sense of the multiplicity of man, of the multiple layers of culture that constitute the patterns of a group and the pattern of an individual, and the infinite plasticity of the human mind. He recognized that it was exactly this reality that the “chauvinist race” hated, could not understand, and wanted to destroy. He understood that the concept of “race” allowed such chauvinists to impose order on human diversity. Although he relegated this thinking to a few pages near the end of his book, they were indicative of a line of analysis about the nature of racial prejudice that was in the air, a sense that perhaps there was a cross-cultural type—a “race-mind” as Barzun would have it in 1939, some kind of “common psychology” as John Dollard put it in 1937, perhaps a racist “personality type”—prevalent in all cultures, or perhaps a function of Western Civilization itself. And one that stood in diametric opposition to them.

But, before the idea of a ‘prejudiced-’ or ‘racist personality’ type could come into view, there had to be a tighter consensus around the mechanics of the psychology of racial prejudice. In the early 1940s, just such a consensus was starting to cohere around the idea of *scapegoating*.

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<sup>126</sup> Barzun, *Race*, 287-8.



**Chapter 3:**  
**“Race Prejudice is Merely One Form of Scapegoatism:”**  
**Devising A New Theory of Racism, 1938-1945**

Chapters One and Two have detailed how some of the leading lights of American social and behavioral science—indeed, of all of American intellectual life in the 1930s—set down new ways of representing and thinking about the racial beliefs and behaviors of white people. Inventively admixing new concepts like ‘culture’ and ‘personality,’ and new intellectual frameworks like psychoanalysis and community studies, with established methods like participant-observation and the analysis of myth, intellectuals like John Dollard and Ruth Benedict brought white people—and their relationship to race—within the purview of American social and behavioral science. Through this process, they created a new ‘subject’—the white racist (with ‘a racist white psyche’)—and established the authority of social and psychological expertise over that subject. And, more broadly, they brought into the mainstream of American intellectual life the kind of openly anti-racist thinking that had long been relegated to its margins, thereby playing crucial legitimating roles in the conversion of American political culture to a nominally anti-racist posture. By the end of the 1930s—better marked by the Nazi invasion of Poland in November, 1939 than the turning over of the decennial calendar—as the Great Depression abated and the crisis of modernity entered a new, martial phase, the ideas sketched out by these anti-racist intellectuals began to take on even greater import.

While Ruth Benedict wrote *Race: Science and Politics* from the precipice of a second Great War, the intellectuals and scientists discussed here in chapter three looked out onto a world already gone over the edge. The start of World War II signaled the

beginning of a new phase in the history of ideas about white racism, or as it was more often called, “race prejudice.” This new phase was brought on by the culmination of two broader intellectual and political trends, both of which had been decades in the making. First, and most importantly, the rise of Nazism as an explicitly white supremacist enemy of the United States opened new terrain in American political culture for anti-racist thinking and activism—terrain that a generation of liberals and leftists aggressively staked as their own.<sup>1</sup> But, of course, as this Popular Front anti-racism moved closer to the center of American national culture in the 1940s, it was also imbricated with ideas of national unity, and even national greatness, that limited just how far ideals of tolerance and pluralism and justice could refigure the American imagination. Second, the War effort itself enhanced the role of social and behavioral science expertise—and particularly psychology and its cognate fields—in identifying, ‘diagnosing,’ and ‘curing’ the problems of American society.<sup>2</sup>

At the point where these two trends converged, a wide range of anti-racist social and behavioral scientists, and other like-minded intellectuals began to cohere around a new way of thinking about the problem of race prejudice. In short, they began to think of white racism as a form of “scapegoating.” In this guise, ‘the racist white psyche’ was possessed by a need to “scapegoat” racial minority groups. As such, the idea of

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<sup>1</sup> On the anti-racist left, see Doug Rossinow, *Vision of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture* (New York: Verso, 1998); and Christopher Vials, *Realism for the Masses: Aesthetics, Popular Front Pluralism, and U.S. Culture, 1935-1947* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), particularly Vials’s introduction. For more on the redefinition of the relationship between race and nation in American politics and culture in the 1940s see Howard Winant, *The World is A Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Expertise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

“scapegoating” cut directly against the prevailing intellectual currents that defined “race prejudice.” The assumed intractability of irrational “race prejudice” had long posed a problem to the liberal imagination: so long as “race prejudice” remained natural, instinctive, and at the very least, extremely durable, then racial conflict appeared inevitable; and, so long as conflict was inevitable, social separation—segregation of work places, residences, public spaces, and schools, combined with elite-managed “interracial cooperation”—appeared as the only viable solution. This was the logic of the majority decision in *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896). This was the logic that, even through the 1920s, led to calls for implementing school and residential segregation *in northern cities* in the wake of the race riots and other forms of racial violence. As an intellectual matter, instinct doctrines lost their scientific credibility by the mid-1920s. And, by the 1930s, most social and behavioral scientists had come to believe that racial and ethnic prejudices were learned, either as “attitudes” gleaned from parents, teachers, or peers, as community mores and values, or from the broader culture—say, in the form of racial myths, as chapter two outlined.<sup>3</sup> But, besides a fairly crude economic determinism, or narrower explanations, like John Dollard’s notions of the “gains” of southern white supremacy, the psychological mechanisms animating “race prejudice” remained obscure and incoherent.

The “scapegoating” concept offered clarity. Few texts outlined the concept better than *ABC’s of Scapegoating* (1943), a pamphlet compiled by Harvard’s famous ‘morale’ seminar under the direction of psychologist Gordon W. Allport.<sup>4</sup> “Scapegoating,” Allport wrote, was “a phenomenon wherein some of the aggressive energies of a person or

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<sup>3</sup> This was the intellectual complement to assumption in rough racial equality, which arrives as scientific consensus at the same time.

<sup>4</sup> On the morale seminar and its significance to the rising tide of psychological expertise during the Second World War see Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology*, chapters 2 and 3.

group”—energies generated from the frustrations and hostilities of everyday life—“are focused upon another individual [or group]; the amount of aggression or blame being... unwarranted.”<sup>5</sup> Although Allport maintained that people often “scapegoated” government officials or labor leaders for their troubles, he recognized that “the goats saddled with the burden of blame” were overwhelmingly racial groups. Such “scapegoating” could take any of a number of forms depending on “environmental circumstance” and “the intensity of immediate provocation,” ranging from telling jokes and spreading rumors, to lynchings, race riots, and “hate strikes,” and even to more complex behaviors like ghettoization and “violent persecutions.” Finally, Allport noted that people were especially prone to bouts of “scapegoating” during times of “abnormal social tension and personal frustration,” when “muddled and pre-logical thinking” kept them from knowing the *real* origins of their “strains and irritations.”<sup>6</sup>

Although no one began to refer explicitly to a “scapegoat theory of prejudice” until the end of the 1940s, Allport’s pamphlet marked the arrival of the “scapegoating” concept into usage as a legitimate psychological and social psychological theory of behavior, and particularly of white racial prejudice.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it was a pair of psychologists from Allport’s seminar who coined the term “scapegoating” itself in 1943, turning the noun form of the concept into a verb, and thereby rhetorically enacting a crucial intellectual shift.<sup>8</sup> They refocused attention away from “the scapegoats,” and onto the *act*

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating* (Chicago: Central YMCA College, n.d.), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Bohdan Zawadzki, “Limitations to the Scapegoat Theory of Prejudice,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 43 (1948).

<sup>8</sup> The verb form, “scapegoating,” first appeared in print in Helene Rank Velfort and George E. Lee, “The Coconut Grove Fire: A Case of Scapegoating,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, v. 38, no. 2, Supplement (April, 1943): 138-154, both of whom were participants in the Harvard seminar. Allport maintained that hostility was often directed at other undeserving groups or individuals, including “government officials,” and “labor leaders.” But, as he found in his study of rumors, most impulses to

of “scapegoating” and the motivations of the “scapegoater.” In other words, the concept of “scapegoating” refocused attention away from “race” itself—away from questions of difference, superiority, or the ‘race-traits’ of Jews, African Americans, Asians; away from intelligence testing, and ‘race mixing,’ and ‘race-war’—and onto the beliefs and behaviors of prejudiced people.

Ostensibly taken up as a theory of social behavior, and of the role played by “race prejudice” in the individual psyche, the “scapegoating” concept served broader intellectual and ideological goals from the outset. Not unlike the concept of “myth” explored in the previous chapter, the idea of “the scapegoat” was a common sense one when social and behavioral scientists began to employ it to explain race prejudice, and it already carried clear political and moral overtones. Indeed, part of its appeal stemmed from this common sense meaning. Likening acts of racial “scapegoating” to “a businessman blow[ing] up at some unhappy defect in his wife’s cooking after a trying day at the office,” as Allport did, offered a new way of conveying to the public the underlying nature and causes of racial conflict.<sup>9</sup> As such, it helped intellectuals like Allport and his ilk skirt the line between moral advocacy and scientific argument. For a collection of psychologists who had set themselves to using their expertise to solve social problems, “scapegoating” held great attraction.

More broadly, anti-racist social scientists appropriated the idea of “the scapegoat” because it shifted debate over race prejudice onto more congenial grounds. The “scapegoating” discourse located the causes of racial hatred, conflict, and violence in the weaknesses of the modern “personality,” the frustrations endemic to modern life, and the

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“scapegoat” found their way to racial targets. For further discussion of Gordon Allport’s interest and thinking about “race prejudice,” see Chapter four, (not quite yet) below.

<sup>9</sup> Allport, *ABC’s of Scapegoating*, 11.

failures of humanity's cultural heritage. The "scapegoating" theory made race prejudice a function of three interrelated factors: first, it was motivated by personal, often unconscious psychological needs, including fear, anxiety, guilt, or the desire for "self-enhancement;" second, prejudice broke out under the influence of broader social, economic and political conditions; and last, people vented their impulses to scapegoat according to patterns set down by their culture. Of course, how these intellectuals conceptualized these factors differed by disciplinary allegiance and political sensibility, as did the relative weight they assigned to each in a given intellectual's overall scheme. But, across this range, the upshot of the "scapegoating" concept remained the same: race prejudice, by this light, was still irrational, but it was also legible, and even predictable. More importantly, it became amenable to the kinds of economic reform, psychological ministrations, and "social engineering" that liberals claimed they could achieve.

Nowhere was the significance of the idea of "scapegoating" more evident than in the paradigmatic work of racial liberalism, Gunnar Myrdal's totemic *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944). Myrdal's was a fighting book, written as a brief for democracy in its war against race-obsessed fascism. But it was also a visionary text, insofar as it noted that America's legitimacy as a global leader in the postwar world—a role Myrdal wholeheartedly endorsed—would depend upon Americans showing the world that they could achieve racial justice. As such, Myrdal positioned himself—and social scientists more generally—against what he thought was the prevailing tradition in American social thought. Specifically, he railed against the propensity to relegate changes in race relations and the status of racial minorities to a realm beyond the reach of conscious political and social intervention. To this end, Myrdal

posited that, at least in part, it was “the Negroes [role] as a scapegoat” that played a crucial role in maintaining the racial inequality in the South. “This hypothesis—if it could be confirmed by further research,” he wrote, “would tend to raise some hope of a change for the better.” But, why? Because “Displaced aggression is less stable and less deep-rooted than other aggression.” Not only can it be “eradicated by such economic developments and reforms as mitigate the primary frustration,” he concluded, “but it can also be easily redirected more easily by education.”<sup>10</sup>

Thinking of “race prejudice” as a form of “scapegoating” represented a reconfiguration of “race” into a different kind of social and political problem. Caught between prejudice as irrational tribalism, on one side, and prejudice as naked self-interest, on the other, left-liberal anti-racist intellectuals imagined a way out. People don’t hate and attack each other just because they are different or because of competition; they hate and attack each other because they possess felt needs to attack “scapegoats.” Race prejudice, in this rendering, was not a sign of intractable racial or economic conflict, but rather of underlying psychological, social, cultural disorder in need of repair.

“Scapegoating” shifted “the race problem” from one of managing racial bodies and racial groups in physical space to managing the needs and workings of ‘racist white psyches.’ The “scapegoating” discourse, then, provided a single, standardized map for identifying those needs, following them to their origins, and tracing out their consequences. As such, much of the broader, ideologically charged debate about race and racial conflict from the 1930s played out on the terrain of “scapegoating” in the 1940s.

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<sup>10</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 598.

The idea that white racial prejudice was a form of “scapegoating” grew out of the kind of thinking seeded by the intellectuals profiled in chapters one and two, above. Indeed, as will become clear below, John Dollard played a crucial role in germinating the insights he gleaned through his study of the southern racism into a generalized and portable theory of racial “scapegoating.” As was the case with the psychological conceptions of “race prejudice” that Dollard, Benedict, Paul Radin, Jacques Barzun, and Herbert Seligmann planted in the 1930s, the concept of “scapegoating” allowed the anti-racist intellectuals whose work I consider here to connect individual psychological needs and desires to larger social systems, political contests, economic interests. Likewise, “scapegoating” explained the psychological appeal of racial ideology to everyday people. But, as the idea of racial “scapegoating” cohered in the early 1940s, it also began to push many of the more trenchant analyses sketched out by previous anti-racist scholars to the margins of intellectual debate. Even in his own subsequent work, Dollard palliated the idea that the psychological and material “gains” of white supremacy reinforced each other, forming a durable bulwark against changes to the racial status quo. Similarly, the idea that racial myths served as cultural threads, suturing together broad racial solidarities, found little purchase in the emerging “scapegoating” discourse.

These losses, though, came with discernible gains. The development of the “scapegoating” theory of racism signaled the ascent of a liberal problematic of race and racial prejudice to the center of American political culture and intellectual life. The concept of “scapegoating” developed into a major theoretical vein in the behavioral scientific consensus on race prejudice, with active scholarly debates over its nature and



social policy consequences.<sup>11</sup> It became a prominent feature in the profusion of scientific, anti-racist literature produced for use in schools and the broader public education efforts of the 1940s.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it retained its role as ideology, as a common sense interpretation of white racial animosity available to a wide range of intellectual and political fellow-travelers.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, by the end of the decade, the two had become nearly synonymous, leading the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn—who would join Allport and others in founding the interdisciplinary Harvard Department of Social Relations after the War—to declare in 1948 that “race prejudice was ... a form of scapegoatism.”<sup>14</sup>

To get a clear vantage point on the contours of the “scapegoating” concept, this chapter tracks its emergence through the work of three of the first behavioral and social scientists who deployed it in the late 1930s and early 1940s: John Dollard, whose map of the southern ‘racist white psyche’ was traced out in chapter one; the Princeton-based psychologist Hadley Cantril, whose success as a pioneering political opinion pollster and political psychologist after the War has largely obscured his earlier ideas about race

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<sup>11</sup> Otto Klineberg’s discipline-defining textbook, *Social Psychology*, published in 1940, dedicated an entire chapter to “Racial Prejudice,” and included a lengthy discussion of the role of scapegoating therein, setting a durable pattern. For more on Klineberg, see below. Otto Klineberg, *Social Psychology* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1940), Chapter 14.

<sup>12</sup> See the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, February 1943 issue, titled “United We’ll Stand,” Hortense Powdermaker and Helen Frances Storen, *Probing Our Prejudices: A Unit for High School Students* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), and the *Journal of Social Issues* inaugural double issue “Racial and Religious Prejudice in Everyday Living,” February and May, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> See Carrey McWilliams’s several books on race and race problems from the 1940s, including: *Brothers Under the Skin* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1943), *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans: A Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1944), and *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1948)

<sup>14</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror For Man: The Relation of Man to Modern Life* (New York, Fawcett, 1948), 146. Indeed, it had cohered well enough for philosopher Hannah Arendt to take it to task in her landmark study *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, published the same year. For Arendt, the “scapegoating” theory of anti-Semitism served as an ideological cover with which to obscure the long and tortured history of the relationship between the Jews and the West—indeed, between anti-Semitism and modernity. Arendt’s judgment, I think, was colored by the fact that she limited herself to Zionist arguments that pin the fate of the Jews on their status as perpetual, international scapegoats of the West. See Hannah Arendt, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948), part 1 on “Anti-Semitism.” See also, Richard I. King, *Race, Racism, and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), chapter 4.

prejudice and mass behavior; and the Boasian anthropologist M.F. Ashley Montagu, whose enduring *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* (1942) remains one of the most widely-read works of anti-racist thought—still in print, now in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition.

Each of these men came from a different intellectual tradition, and each wrote with a different end in mind. Indeed, seen in juxtaposition, the parallel nature of their analyses offers an indication of how pervasively the idea of “scapegoating” spread through the social and behavioral sciences as a theory for explaining white racial prejudice. For instance, in *Frustration and Aggression* (1939), Dollard, the psychoanalytically trained sociologist and dedicated ‘interdisciplinary,’ joined with a team of scholars to set a long-term research agenda that might yield a new theory of human behavior. Cantril came up in the American grain of psychology and social psychology, an heir to William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead—and largely opposed to Freud. Fashioning himself into a kind of ‘applied’ social psychologist, he set himself the task of offering an educated general readership psychological interpretations of contemporary world events, as he did with his analyses of Nazism and the southern lynch mob (among others) in *The Psychology of Social Movements* (1941). Montagu was a Boasian, and wrote his book as a popular primer on the race concept along the same path of scientific anti-racism cut by Franz Boas in *Mind of Primitive Man* and, as we saw in chapter two, by Ruth Benedict in *Race: Science and Politics*. Much as his mentors had, he took on the problem of race prejudice as an addendum to his critique of prevailing racial fallacies.

Further, none of these men set out to develop a new theory of race prejudice or racial conflict in the late 1930s and early 1940s. At the time, “scapegoating” was still inchoate as a concept, more a metaphor and a flexible, short-hand description of certain

kinds of irrational behavior than a statement of causes and consequences. Each from his own direction, though, Dollard, Cantril and Montagu confronted race prejudice as a problem to be explained. And, when they did, they all made use of the logic of “scapegoating” to make sense of and to explain that problem. In doing so, they each enacted the same intellectual maneuver, often times without recognizing it. They took up common sense idea—the idea that people will commonly blame, and even attack socially acceptable scapegoats to salve frustrations whose causes are obscure—expanded its core logic to fit new needs, and lent to it new explanatory power. As such, their work staked out the boundaries of a new discourse of racial “scapegoating,” established its key dynamics, and cut the grooves that subsequent like-minded intellectuals would follow when they too confronted the problem of race prejudice. In short, their work helped to create a durable pattern for analyzing and arguing about race prejudice and racial conflict in the next decade.

Of course, their specific renditions of racial “scapegoating” differed. Within the protean framework of the “scapegoating” concept, they differed in how they conceptualized the psychological drives animating racial “scapegoating”, where they located the underlying root causes of racial hatred, when they imagined the patterns of racial “scapegoating” were established in a society, why the world was facing such a profusion of racial “scapegoating” in the late 1930s and 1940s. And, finally, they differed on what could be done about it.<sup>15</sup> These differences shaped their contributions to the larger discourse on racial “scapegoating.” Dollard’s work, for instance, gave the concept of “scapegoating” a vital shot of intellectual legitimacy by providing new analytical

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<sup>15</sup> As chapter 4 will address, the question of *who* was most prone to “scapegoating”—what kind of personalities could become “addicted to scapegoating,” as Allport put it—would come to predominate in the late 1940s and on into the 1950s.

clarity and sophistication. Cantril, with his finger on the political pulse of the nation, showed how private beliefs and psychological needs transformed into mass political behavior. Montagu, for his part, linked the needs on display in racial “scapegoating” with deep deficits of American culture. Further, these differences revealed some of the ideological tensions within the left-liberal sphere around questions of race: was “scapegoating” a necessary lightening-rod to carry off dangerous psychic currents, as Dollard had it; was it, as Cantril suggested, a safety-valve, to be opened by elites to release popular discontent (and subject to anti-democratic manipulation); or, was it a maladaptation caused by tensions in the modern Western way of life, as Montagu thought?

Focusing on these three intellectuals also gives a better view of the fundamental tension that ran beneath all of the anti-racist conceptions of the psychology of white “race prejudice” discussed in this dissertation. For Dollard, Cantril, and Montagu, “scapegoating” was the mechanism animating the forces threatening to overcome the civilized world, and thus was both dangerous and morally wrong. And yet, from their vantages, racial “scapegoating” also appeared to be a function of normal psychological mechanisms in the white psyche (in all psyches for that matter), and followed social patterns deemed acceptable by society at large. Racial prejudice was both a profound threat to social cohesion, and a functionally necessary outlet for social distress. Put in terms that conveyed the gravity of the problem as they saw it, race prejudice was both the greatest threat to the future of civilization, as well as endemic to an American culture that seemed to be Civilization’s ‘last, best hope.’ In their efforts to reconcile this tension—or to evade it entirely—they helped set the terms by which the problem of race prejudice

would be debated in the decades ahead.

### *A Genealogy of Scapegoating*

To Sir James Frazer, the British mythographer whose monumental *The Golden Bough* (1909) served as the encyclopedia of human mythology for a generation of modernist intellectuals and writers, “scapegoat myths” dated back to the earliest of human civilizations. When he published the first editions of his life’s work in 1890, he found enough such stories to fill a single chapter; by the time he set about expanding his original compendium some twenty years later, he found “scapegoats” sufficient to warrant a dedicated volume. (Admittedly, this probably had more to do with Frazer’s diligence as a researcher than the profusion of scapegoat stories; after all, by 1915, *The Golden Bough* had swelled from the original two- to the full-figured, twelve volume length he left it at the time of his death.) Although the first such myths have undoubtedly slipped beyond the horizon of historical memory, the name Frazer gave to this category of myths—‘scapegoat’—dated only to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Jewish parable of Abraham’s goat in the book of Leviticus was translated from Hebrew to English as part of the creation of the King James Bible. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the idea cohered into a common sense usage by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: to ‘make a scapegoat’ of a person or a group meant to heap upon them the collective sins of the wider social group so as to achieve absolution or relief of collective guilt, or to sacrifice a representative of the elite to public blame to preserve the legitimacy of elites as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

The “scapegoat” concept was drafted into explicitly anti-racist duties only at the

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<sup>16</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (London: James MacMillian & Co., 1890). For more on the image of “the scapegoat” in myths and history, see Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat*, Yvonne Freccero, trans. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the Dreyfus Affair that consumed France during the 1890s, prominent liberal and Jewish intellectuals began to deploy the term to counter the arguments of the French Right that anti-Semitism stemmed from the inherent evil of the Jews, or their fundamental incompatibility with the French nation. For the *Dreyfussards*, French conservatives were trying to make Major Dreyfus—and, indeed, all French Jews—into ‘scapegoats’ for the declining fortunes of France itself, fortunes for which the Right deserved the blame. Despite the fact that Dreyfus was eventually vindicated, and the far Right relegated to the margins of French political life, the Affair ultimately turned liberal Jewish intellectuals like Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau toward Zionism. They concluded that the Jews of Europe would never achieve the kind of social integration they had sought for so long, and thus would always remain vulnerable to being targeted as scapegoats. In any case, the idea of “the scapegoat” served as a way for anti-racists to draw out and call attention to the political and social uses of racial falsehoods by self-interested political actors aiming to subvert popular will.

In short order, the idea that racial groups served as ‘scapegoats’ for social tensions and political conflicts began to cross the Atlantic, and embed itself into wider anti-racist discourse. By 1920, for instance, Herbert Seligmann, the prominent civil rights journalist whom we met in Chapter 2, noted in his *The Negro Faces America* that “The Negro has been used as a bogy or a scapegoat, as the case may be, in the argument of every political and social question, from Prohibition to the League of Nations.”<sup>17</sup> The idea that blacks and Jews were being used as scapegoats for deeper social tensions allowed anti-racist intellectuals to develop a clear rebuttal to claims that minority groups *caused* such conflict. The “scapegoating” idea provided a lever with which anti-racist intellectuals

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<sup>17</sup> Herbert J. Seligmann, *The Negro Faces America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 184.

could drive the question of racial difference to the margins of debate, moving questions of social conditions and the motivations of (often nefarious) political leadership to its center. Defeats, demagogues, and depressions, not ‘Negro’ inferiority or ‘Jewish’ scheming lay at the root of racial prejudice. The idea of the “scapegoat” offered a different interpretation, a story, even imagery for making sense of racial hatreds and conflict. It provided a protean framework within which a range of anti-racist arguments could develop that placed the onus for racial strife and hatred on the machinations of unscrupulous, power-hungry, or deranged people—later to be labeled as “racists”—and focused critical scrutiny on questions about the appeal of scapegoats to the masses.

During the 1930s, the concept of racial scapegoating began to lead a dual life. In one guise, it continued to serve as a cornerstone in anti-racist arguments for political and social conflict, especially the increasingly acute Popular Front analyses of fascism. Most European critics of Mussolini’s and Hitler’s political movements in the 1930s emphasized their authoritarian or autocratic character, or their relationship to capitalism. American leftist intellectuals and activists defined fascism by the common tendency to attack racial scapegoats. In other words, it was leftist intellectuals—like those profiled in chapter 2—forced Americans to realize the connections between fascism and racism. These thinkers saw the concept of scapegoating as the link between reactionary social movements in Europe and Japanese imperialism in the East, Jim Crow negro-phobia in the American South, and anti-Semitism across the Western world. Indeed, the concept of racial “scapegoating” linked fascism as a political and social movement with the failures of capitalism. “The anti-Negroism of Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, and a half-dozen other states of the Union is first cousin to—no, direct progenitor of—Fascism at its

worst in Hitler's Germany," wrote the National Urban League's executive secretary, Lester Granger, in 1944.<sup>18</sup>

In its second guise, "scapegoating" also began to migrate into the mainstream of American social science and social thought, serving as a new common sense explanation for racial conflict or violence. When Helen and Robert Lynd returned to Muncie, Indiana in the mid-1930s to see how "Middletown" was weathering the Great Depression, following up their landmark 1929 study of American life, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*, they noted that there had recently been a bout of anti-Jewish violence in town, driven undoubtedly by the extreme duress under which the townsfolk had been living.<sup>19</sup> In a different vein, Arthur Raper and Guy Johnson, two race relations sociologists coming out of the University of North Carolina, began in the 1930s to correlate instances of white anti-black violence to steep declines in cotton prices, indicating that the real roots of lynching laid deeper than any particular violation of southern racial etiquette.<sup>20</sup> Although it was explicitly presented as a "well-known social phenomena," the scapegoat theory of race prejudice carried with it a host of assumptions that marked a key shift in thinking about race. By deploying the idea of "scapegoating," social and behavioral scientists relegated such mainstays as the characteristics of victim groups or the "race relations cycle" increasingly to the background of their analyses, and replaced them with broader considerations of economic structure, prevailing social conditions, and the psychology of whites.

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<sup>18</sup> Rossinow, *Visions of Progress*, 169. For the Popular Front and its anti-racist theory of fascism, again see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*. See also Rabbi Stephen Wise, "Parallel Between Hitlerism and Persecution of Negroes," *The Crisis*, 41, 5 (May 1934): 127-129.

<sup>19</sup> Helen Lynd and Robert Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1937).

<sup>20</sup> See Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).



Of course, the concept's two lives were in no way antithetical. Indeed, most of the academically based intellectuals who made use of the idea of scapegoating were dedicated anti-racists and openly sympathetic to the Popular Front, if not active participants. But, the relationship between movement intellectuals and institutional ones was not fixed. Part of the movement of "scapegoating" ideas into mainstream social thought entailed a subtle shift in the kind of explanatory work for which the concept was employed. As the fortunes of the Popular Front in American political culture rose and fell in the late 1930s, the significance of "scapegoating" in American social thought also changed. In the 1910s and 1920s, to 'make a scapegoat' of Jews or Negroes referred specifically to the acts of identifiable political or intellectual leaders who were using racial groups to distract their constituents or to propagandize a population. For the social scientists that made use of the idea in the 1930s, the concept of "scapegoating" took on different meanings. On the one hand, the problem of "scapegoating" renewed interest in demagoguery and in the power that demagogues held over crowds. But, on the other hand, the concept itself became a more diffuse. The capacity and even the will to scapegoat a minority group became dispersed among society at large. The focus of social scientific attention shifted to the group doing the "scapegoating"—even if they were not conscious of what they were doing—and away from the political or thought leaders who were directed them. Indeed, "scapegoating" became a social phenomenon connected to deeper changes in the economy and culture rather than solely a political strategy deployed by elites.

As useful as the logic of racial scapegoating became to the task of understanding the American social scene in the 1930s, it proved indispensable to analyzing complex

dynamics on evidence with rise of Nazism. In a series of influential articles and books published in the mid-1930s, the propaganda scholar, political psychologist, and general *wunderkind* Harold D. Lasswell developed a theory for the rise of Nazism rooted in the psychology of “scapegoating.” As historian Ellen Herman has astutely noted, many of the intellectual trends that dominated American thought in the middle decades of the twentieth century were foreshadowed [by] Lasswell’s work, not the least of which was the impact of the research and thinking of Erich Fromm and the Frankfurt School of critical theorists on an American audience. In a widely read article on the “The Psychology of Hitlerism” (1933), and his subsequent *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (1935), he outlined a psycho-social theory of political demagoguery rooted in the capacity of certain leaders to use their own need for a scapegoat to attune themselves to the emotional needs of peoples suffering from broad social or political disruptions.<sup>21</sup> In particular, he was the first intellectual to articulate for an American audience the idea that the key to Nazi political success was their recognition that the German *petite bourgeoisie*, squeezed between an ascendant proletariat and a still-powerful, conservative aristocracy through the 1920s, were primed for conversion to fascism by their need for a revived sense of national greatness and a scapegoat for their own troubles.<sup>22</sup>

Broadening Lasswell’s insights, in 1939 the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, a left-leaning off-shoot of the American Psychological Association that formed in the mid-1930s for express purpose of bringing psychological tools of analysis

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<sup>21</sup> Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology*. In the same grain, the (psychoanalytically-inspired) literary critic and philosopher Kenneth Burke undertook sophisticated readings of the rhetorical devices that gave the speeches of demagogues like Hitler and Father Coughlin their mass appeal, a phenomena he identified as the “scapegoat mechanism.”

<sup>22</sup> Harold Lasswell, “The Psychology of Hitlerism,” *The Political Quarterly* 4, 3 (July 1933): 373-384; Harold Lasswell, *World Politics and Insecurity* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1935).

to bear on contemporary social problems, published a statement on Nazism that encapsulated perfectly the work of the “scapegoating” concept. Recognizing that Nazi racial characterization of Jews had no basis in reality, the statement noted that psychologists had to “look elsewhere for the explanation of current racial hatred and persecution.” Such theories could have developed only “under the domination of powerful emotional attitudes. A well-known psychological tendency leads people to blame others for their own misfortunes, and the Nazis have found in the Jew a convenient psychological scapegoat for their own economic and political disabilities.”<sup>23</sup>

The extent to which the idea of “scapegoating” entered into mainstream social and behavioral science discourse, and particularly the analysis of race prejudice, can be seen in the work of another luminary of American social thought, the Columbia University-trained social psychologist Otto Klineberg. In 1940, for instance, Klineberg published one of the first college-level textbook for the nascent discipline of social psychology.<sup>24</sup> At the time, he was only a few years removed from completing his landmark study, *Race Differences* (1935), which quickly became the scientific bedrock for advocates of racial equality, and only a few years away from directing the research agenda of the newly formed United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—quite literally, the social scientist for the world.<sup>25</sup> In his chapter on “Race Prejudice,” Klineberg surveyed prevailing theories of racial conflict—including theories rooted in notions of

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<sup>23</sup> I. Krechevsky, “Psychologists Criticize ‘Racial’ Psychology,” *Journal of Social Psychology S.P.S.S.I Bulletin* 10 (1939): 301-308; 303-4. Of course, see chapters 1 and 2 as well.

<sup>24</sup> Otto Klineberg, *Social Psychology* (1940).

<sup>25</sup> Otto Klineberg, *Race Differences* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935). Based on Klineberg’s work here, Gunnar Myrdal selected him to put together the definitive statement of racial differences among African American for *The American Dilemma* projects which was eventually published on its own as *Characteristics of the American Negro* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944). On Klineberg’s role at UNESCO, see Frances Cherry, Holly Ellingwood, and Gisell Castillo, “‘Cautious Courage’: SPSSI’s Connections and Reconnections at the United Nations” *Journal of Social Issues* 61, 1 (2011): 165-178.

“consciousness of kind,” instinctive or “native aggressiveness,” and individual psychological animosities created by “personal experiences”—and found them all wanting.<sup>26</sup> In doing so, he demonstrated the key interpretive thrust practiced by liberal American social and behavioral sciences in the late 1930s, namely to attack essentialist and deterministic theories of race prejudice.

As for his own take, Klineberg thought that “race prejudice” was primarily and “economic” phenomenon, by which he meant that it was born of the desire to exploit, expropriate wealth, and reduce labor market competition from groups deemed racially different. Although he put the weight of significance on material factors—“The existence of prejudice is not primarily a psychological problem, but a socio-economic one”—he also recognized the closely intertwined relationship between economics and psychology of “scapegoating.” Race prejudice, he wrote, also served “second purpose...allied to the economic motive,” but “sufficiently distinct to deserve special attention, namely, finding a scapegoat to blame for all hardships and calamities.” “Scapegoats” were useful in the economic and the political spheres, where they can “serve as an instrument in the hands of those in authority to persuade the people that a minority group is responsible for all their misfortune.”<sup>27</sup> Although by no means unanimous, Klineberg’s sense of the balance between the material bases of race prejudice and those rooted in “scapegoating” was broadly shared 1930s and early 1940s. But, so too was the utter lack of any real sense of the relationship between specific economic motivations, political machinations, and

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<sup>26</sup> Klineberg, *Social Psychology*, 374-384. Interestingly, unconvinced by the neo-Freudian or ‘cultural’ turn, Klineberg lumped Freudian explanations in among the instinct theorists.

<sup>27</sup> Klineberg, *Social Psychology*, 392-3; 398-99. To support his notion of “scapegoating,” Klineberg cites Hovland and Sears’s example about cotton-prices and lynching, the key piece of empirical evidence from *Frustration and Aggression*. Which it to say that he disagrees with the “frustration-aggression” hypothesis even as he concedes the theoretical significance of “scapegoating.”

racial “scapegoating.” That would come from elsewhere.

This brief genealogy of the idea of “scapegoating” reveals the two broad transformations underway through the 1930s in the way anti-racist intellectuals thought about the problems of race prejudice. The first of these was the gradual shift in focus from the differences between racial groups themselves as the cause of race prejudice and racial conflict—from their culture or phenotype, their language or customs, their lower social status—to the perceptions, needs, desires, and behaviors of the groups doing the “scapegoating.” This shift from *racialized bodies* to *racist minds* was reflected in a shift in usage, noted in the introduction. Until the early 1940s, intellectuals used the term “scapegoat” exclusively as a noun—to “make a scapegoat”—focusing attention toward the reasons why particular groups were targeted, namely a history of conflict, physical differences, or of ‘strange’ customs. By the early 1940s, intellectuals began to use the verb form—“scapegoating” or “scapegoater”—focusing attention on the person or group doing the scapegoating, and the reasons why. Further, this shift in meaning spoke directly to the second transformation, namely the growth of the behavioral sciences and psychology as the dominant conceptual matrix through which anti-racist intellectuals would explore the nature of racism. We can see both of these trends coming to fruition in John Dollard’s follow-up to his ground-breaking *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*.

***Frustration, Aggression, and the Anatomy of Race Prejudice***

Otto Klineberg’s textbook on social psychology was among the first published, and by including a chapter dedicated to “Race Prejudice” it signaled the growing disciplinary hegemony of behavioral sciences on the problems of prejudice. After Klineberg, social psychology—and for that matter, psychology—textbooks routinely featured (at least) one

chapter on prejudice. And, virtually all of them dedicated space to the “scapegoating” theory of race prejudice. But, for the most part, these books do not cite Otto Klineberg. Instead, they all cited John Dollard’s (and Leonard Doob’s, Neal Miller’s, O.H. Mowrer, Robert Sears’s) *Frustration and Aggression*.<sup>28</sup> And they did so for good reason, as few works in the behavioral sciences were more influential in the 1940s, especially on questions about the nature of race prejudice.

After all, even as it was becoming an increasingly common and commonsense way to explain racial conflict, the idea of “scapegoating” remained something of a psychological black box through much of the 1930s. Social forces and economic conditions went in, political and social behaviors came out, but no one knew what went on inside. “Scapegoating” clearly provided some psychological satisfaction to the individual. But, just as clearly, some people gained more than others, and some people were largely resistant to scapegoating all together. At the same time, “scapegoating” seemed to evince some form of group consciousness, and even served a social function. But, from the choice of groups to scapegoat, to the particular form that it took, the patterns of “scapegoating” behavior differed by nation and culture. By opening the black box of racial “scapegoating,” and revealing the psychological and social psychological operations at work inside, behavioral scientists, and anti-racist intellectuals more generally, provided a glimpse into the basic mechanisms driving the conflicts wracking the modern world. The descriptions they proffered of what they found inside, and how it worked, cohered through the 1940s into a new “scapegoating” theory of racism. Few scholars did more to lay bare the psychological workings of racial “scapegoating,” or the psychological underpinnings of race prejudice more generally than John Dollard.

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<sup>28</sup> John Dollard, et al., *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).

As chapter 1 chronicled, John Dollard went to the South in the mid-1930s in hopes of using the region, and its relationship to race, as a living laboratory for outlining a general theory of human behavior along Freudian lines. As such, he ended *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* with a brief discussion of the psycho-dynamics underlying the southern “race problem.” With his position at Yale’s Institute for Human Relations secured by the success of his psycho-social travelogue, Dollard set about refining his ideas. In 1939, he brought his ambitions for a unified theory of human behavior to fruition with the publication of the jointly-authored *Frustration and Aggression*.<sup>29</sup> Guided by a commitment to interdisciplinary and collective research in the human sciences and a thirst for social and political relevance, the *Frustration and Aggression* project perfectly embodied the general spirit of the IHR. In practice, though, the book’s central proposition—“that frustration always leads to aggression”—mainly reflected the interests and thinking of its lead author. Indeed, as a distillation of the insights he generated in his study of the South, *Frustration and Aggression* marked the culmination of Dollard’s larger intellectual project.<sup>30</sup>

As the choice of title reflected, *Frustration and Aggression* epitomized the turn among Freudian thinkers toward ego psychology in the late 1930s, and toward

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<sup>29</sup> John Dollard, et al., *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939). My reading of Dollard’s work in *Frustration and Aggression*—indeed, my willingness to attribute whole sections of the book to Dollard authorship—stems from my comparison of the book with an article Dollard published a year earlier titled “Fear and Hostility in Social Life,” in which he also addresses the “race prejudice situation.” See John Dollard, “Fear and Hostility in Social Life,” *Social Forces* 17, 1 (1938): 15-26. See also, Franz Alexander’s response to Dollard in the same issue: Franz Alexander, “Response to Dollard’s ‘Fear and Hostility in Social Life,’” *Social Forces* 17, 1 (1938): 27-9.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter One. John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937). Historian Anne Rose argues that the shift in Dollard’s work from *Caste and Class* to *Frustration and Aggression* represented part of a wider retreat among American social and behavioral sciences from the dirty details of everyday life in the South to the more rarified—and safer—air of abstraction that increasingly came to characterize post-War social science. See Anne Rose, “Putting the South on the Psychological Map: The Impact of Region and Race on the Human Sciences in the 1930s,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 71, 2 (May 2005): 321-356.

‘aggression’ rather than *eros* as the instinctual root of human behavior.<sup>31</sup> Using a generalized life history to illustrate the development of the ego, Dollard showed how the process by which children were ‘socialized’ to the prevailing norms of a social group created a ‘frustration-aggression’ complex. From the perspective of the individual child, the process of socialization felt like a battle, as parents increasingly thwarted the child’s impulses and deprived it of its desires for the purpose of preparing the child for the demands of organized social life. Such efforts caused ‘frustration’ in the child, which in turn impelled some form of ‘aggression.’ Instinctively, people directed their aggressions at the causes of the initial frustration—parents at first, social norms or other causes later in life. But, because such aggressive impulses threatened to fray the social fabric, they were taboo, subject to severe rebuke, and thus suppressed. As each person’s storehouse of frustrations filled, and the resulting aggression remained pent-up, inevitably, necessarily, the individual had to ‘vent’ or ‘displace’ his or her aggression onto a socially acceptable outlet—a scapegoat. Of course, violating the taboo on the expression of aggression, even in one’s imagination, induced guilt, which in turn stimulated the projection of one’s aggression onto the same scapegoat, thereby touching off a vicious circle—people blaming their victims for sins they themselves were committing.<sup>32</sup>

Obviously, Dollard cast race prejudice as the paradigmatic form of displaced, or “indirect” aggression, with racial minority groups serving as the most readily available outlet for aggressive behavior left open by American society. In developing this psycho-social theory of race prejudice, however, Dollard did not suggest that racial animosity

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that Dollard’s self-identified touchstone was Freud’s the theory of social development, sketched out in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930).

<sup>32</sup> John Dollard, *et al.*, *Frustration and Aggression*, chapters 1 and 2. Dollard downplayed the significance of ‘projection’ in *Frustration and Aggression*, leaving this aspect of his thinking to “Fear and Hostility in Social Life.”



stemmed solely from “scapegoating.” Hedging his bets, he signaled his Chicago sociology *bona fides* and his fealty to William Graham Sumner by maintaining that race prejudice was, in part, a form of “direct aggression”—a rational hostility generated in defense of an existing economic or social order, as in the case of the “race riots of post-war days in Chicago and East St. Louis.”<sup>33</sup> In such cases, the dominant white group directed its aggression against the “invading and frustrating Negroes” exactly because the latter were “invading” the space and “frustrating” the ambitions of the whites. At the same time, though, Dollard thought that most of what constituted “race prejudice” was a form of “indirect” or “displaced aggression”—of scapegoating—in which people blamed and attacked racial minority groups for “frustrations” that arose from general social conditions—conditions having nothing to do with the behavior or presence of those racial groups in question. In other words, such displacement was an inherently irrational “venting” of aggressions built up from everyday life that, if not released in the form of race prejudice, would threaten precious social cohesion.<sup>34</sup>

Although Dollard lingered over the basic distinction between “direct” and “displaced” aggression only briefly, this conceptual division belied a tectonic shift in thinking about the self and its relation to “race.” The idea that race prejudice derived from the direct competition between racial groups relied on the notion of an archaic social psychology inherited from the age in which “every stranger was an enemy,” as Franz Boas phrased it, a notion akin to discredited ideas like ‘consciousness of kind.’ This conception reduced the psychology of race prejudice to a function of naturalistic notions of group identity: prejudice was the subjective emotional dimension of the

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<sup>33</sup> Dollard, *Frustration and Aggression*, 152.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

defense of group integrity, social cohesion, and status. Out of intellectual fashion after the 1920s, this notion of prejudice as a function of evolutionary psychology lingered, often unexpressed, in most discussion of the race problem. Even Dollard tried to recast this inherently conservative impulse to fit with his larger framework, resulting in the rather awkward idea of a “defensive aggression.” But, by applying the ‘frustration-aggression’ hypothesis to “race prejudice,” Dollard was sketching out a conceptual map of the wider problem of racial conflict on a different scale and according to a different intellectual legend.

Within the framework of the frustration-aggression hypothesis, Dollard’s analysis of the race prejudice unfolded along three distinct lines—lines that would structure the wider scapegoating theory of racism through the 1940s. The first of these inquiries tried to pin down the role of “race prejudice” within the “emotional economy” of the individual white psyche, and to analyze race prejudice in terms of personal “motivations” and personality “traits.”<sup>35</sup> In Dollard’s model, after the basic mechanics of “scapegoating”—repression, projection, and displacement—took shape in the psyche, the individual employed them to cope with a range of unpleasant or dangerous emotional reactions. At the same time, he noted that personality traits specific to each individual, and visible only through a thorough knowledge of specific life histories, determined whether or not any particular person engaged in scapegoating. Some people, for reasons peculiar to them, were “slow to hate,” Dollard thought, while others were “quick to hate,” eager to welcome “each small provocation in adult life...as an opportunity to release a

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<sup>35</sup> On the development of “motivation” in psychology, see Kurt Danziger, *Naming the Mind: How Psychology Found Its Language* (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: SAGE Publishing, 1997), chapter 7.

flood of aggressive responses.”<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, Dollard’s theory inquired after the relationship between individual expressions of race prejudice and broader social conditions. In doing so, of course, he substantiated the general sense that, whatever their origins in the individual personality, expressions of race prejudice reflected the prevailing social context. For his part, Dollard recognized that, regardless of their individual proclivities, people were prone to engage in acts of racial “scapegoating” whenever the economic or political climate worsened, and that this meant that any efforts to effect “scapegoating” behavior would necessarily entail addressing the root causes of hostility in society.<sup>37</sup> More interested in setting terms of debate than arriving at firm conclusions, though, Dollard did not offer his sense of how deep those root causes actually went. In fact, holding back a rising intellectual tide—the tide of studies purporting to show that “democratic” societies inherently produced less fear and frustration in their constituents than did “fascist” or “authoritarian” ones—Dollard scrupulously avoided postulating that particular forms of social organization generated greater amounts of “free floating hostility” than others. (Nor, incidentally, did he suggest whether the general social environment or the individual capacity to resist the urge to scapegoat held greater sway over the amount of “race prejudice” in society.) What he did establish, though, was that people attacked scapegoats because they did not

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<sup>36</sup> Dollard, *Frustration and Aggression*, 88.

<sup>37</sup> In support of this, Dollard cited the study of one of his co-authors, Robert R. Sears, who in conjunction with Carl I. Hovland, established a positive statistical correlation between incidence of lynching and declines in the price of cotton. See their groundbreaking “Minor Studies in Aggression VI: Correlation of Lynching with Economic Indices,” *Journal of Psychology* 9 (1940). Their study, based on data collected by others, became the empirical touchstone of the ‘frustration-aggression’ hypothesis literally for decades. The usefulness of this study was not negatively affected by the appearance, as early as 1949, of thoroughgoing critiques of both their data and their analyses thereof. Indeed, their supposed proof of the relationship between lynching and cotton prices was still widely cited in text-book treatments of the ‘frustration-aggression’ thesis into the 1980s. See John Shelton Reed, Gail E. Doss, Jeanne S. Hurlbert, “Too Good to Be False: An Essay in the Folklore of Social Science,” *Sociological Inquiry* 57 (January 1987): 1-11.

know, did not understand, or could not address the real causes of their frustrations. On some level, then, the problem of “scapegoating” was inherently a problem of social knowledge.

Thirdly, in considering which groups became scapegoats in a society, Dollard’s theory staked out a new relationship between race prejudice and culture. Although the capacity to scapegoat was a product of individual psychological development, and the need to scapegoat was felt by the individual psyche, the patterns of acceptable “scapegoating” behavior, Dollard thought, were decidedly social, laid down by culture. Indeed, he thought that each society or culture was characterized, literally, by the particular forms of frustration it imposed on its members from childhood, as well as by the kinds of scapegoats it allowed people to attack. As Dollard phrased it, people were given “social ‘permission to hate’” specific racial groups in a society, and thus suffered no social retribution for displacing their aggressions onto such groups. Dollard thought that these “social permissions” often developed out of historical “rivalries” with other racial groups, and that the cultural patterns created by such rivalries persisted as stereotypes and traditions long after the active conflict had passed.<sup>38</sup> But, regardless of their origins, the key point was that people “scapegoated” those groups they were given tacit permission to scapegoat.

Of course, because each society’s “social permissions” to hate were unique, this invited a kind ‘comparative scapegoating’ framework of analysis. Throughout his study of the South, Dollard had used the contrast with the North to highlight the unique patterns of southern belief and behavior. Rather than adapt his analysis to account for patterns of racial scapegoating in other parts of the U.S., or to illustrate how social systems not based

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<sup>38</sup> Dollard, *Frustration and Aggression*, 152.

on “caste patterning” necessitated the targeting of other groups, Dollard turned his attention in a different direction—a direction that clearly reflected how much the global political context had changed in just two years. In *Frustration and Aggression*, Dollard compared the frustrations and aggressions distinctive to democratic (the U.S.), fascist (Italy and Germany), and communist (the Soviet Union) societies. In the resulting comparison of political cultures, the patterns of race prejudice served as a kind of cultural marker for the “characteristic frustrations” of each society (but again, oddly enough, not a normative feature). Reflecting the “national character” studies that his friend Margaret Mead was soon to get underway, Dollard noted that the drive for obedience that characterized both fascist and communist societies—though put to different ends—stood in direct contrast to the competitiveness that marked (or marred) American economic life and social group pluralism. Accordingly, he observed that fascist societies created strict, official patterns of permission, starting explicitly with the Jews, moving on to other groups. The Soviets also created strict patterns, he thought, but in their case they created pattern *against* race prejudice; in the place of racial or ethnic “scapegoating,” the Soviet elite identified the class enemies of the Russian people to scapegoat.

In this schema, the US took on a very different role. Relegating his own work on the South to an aside, Dollard posited that American culture decidedly *lacked* an overarching, official pattern of racial scapegoating. Instead, it was characterized by a diffuse network of racial prejudices that waxed and waned in intensity depending on the amount of general hostility. But, more to the point, he identified the American pioneer tradition of individualism as the dominant American pattern of “scapegoating,” a pattern in which people *blamed themselves first* for the frustrations they suffered. This shift in

frame of reference from regional and social class differences in race prejudice within the US to national differences in international perspective, like so much else in Dollard's work, foreshadowed the years ahead.<sup>39</sup>

*Frustration and Aggression* quickly became one of the most widely cited texts in the behavioral sciences, even as initial reviews of the book, particularly among the more humanistically-inclined, were decidedly mixed. It helped to spur two key features of post-War American psychology, namely the study of "aggression" as the cause of any number of social maladies, and the turn toward more rigorous scientific experimentation—critics would call it "positivist"—as the preferred method of conducting behavioral science research. Indeed, almost immediately it launched a virtual cottage-industry of follow-up studies, many of which modified the overly sweeping initial hypothesis—not all frustration lead to aggression, psychologists found, and aggression stemmed from sources other than frustration.<sup>40</sup> By 1950, a mere eleven years after the book's initial publication, a British social psychologist wrote up a review of on-going or recently completed experiments of Dollard's hypothesis. It came to thirty-one pages.<sup>41</sup> And, such experiments continued well into the 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

While many of the finer points of John Dollard's 'frustration-aggression' theory were subjected to intense debate over the next decade and beyond, it remained one of the

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<sup>39</sup> Dollard, *Frustration and Aggression*, chapter 7.

<sup>40</sup> A brief list of these might include the "Minor Studies in Aggression" series, numbers 1, 2, and 4 (apparently number 3 did not pass muster) published by Neal Miller and Carl Hovland in the *Journal of Psychology*, and a symposium on the "frustration-aggression hypothesis" published in the *Psychological Review* in 1941, with articles by Miller, Sears, A.H. Maslow, and anthropologist Gregory Bateson, among others.

<sup>41</sup> Hilde Himmelweit, "Frustration and Aggression: a review of recent experimental work," in T.H. Pear, *Psychological Factors in Peace and War* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 161-191.

<sup>42</sup> In 1989, *Psychological Bulletin* published a major review and summary of recent work pertaining to the frustration-aggression hypothesis. See Leonard Berkowitz, "Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis: Examination and Reformulation," *Psychological Bulletin* 106, 1 (1989): 59-73.

major theoretical interventions in the study of prejudice. Taken as a whole it established the template for the broader “scapegoating” approach to the race problems that rose to prominence during the 1940s. Setting aside those forms of prejudice born of “direct” competition between racial groups—and liberal intellectuals would increasingly do just that—racial “scapegoating” was a form of displaced aggression, emanating from personal psychological needs, pushed to the level of acute crisis by broader, hostility-inducing social conditions, and discharged onto specific minority groups according to the prevailing patterns race prejudice and social permission stitched into culture. Although his agnosticism on questions of political culture put him out of step with many of his fellow social scientists, Dollard’s approach lent “scapegoating” an interpretation of race prejudice both analytical clarity—it broke “scapegoating” into its constituent parts—as well as scientific legitimacy.

For all its limitations, why did this general notion of racial “scapegoating” make sense to John Dollard and to so many of his peers? Part of the answer rests on the intellectual disposition and deeper assumptions that Dollard shared with his fellow culturally- and psychologically-minded intellectuals. In the scapegoating conception of racism, “race prejudice” was born of the kind of irrationality that made sense to those behavioral scientists who, like Dollard, had absorbed the insights of Freud and ‘the new psychology.’ In other words, this was a theory of racism rooted in “personality” for a generation and a class of intellectuals that was used to thinking in terms of “personality.”<sup>43</sup> The “scapegoating” theory assumed the existence of a kind of psychological subject capable of psychological displacement and projection that matched their sense of the nature of the self. The “scapegoating” white psyche was exactly the

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<sup>43</sup> This relationship between prejudice and “personality” is the subject of chapter 4.

kind of racist white psyche they could understand.

More instrumentally, the idea of racial “scapegoating” made the irrationalities of race prejudice newly legible to anti-racist social and behavioral scientists, and liberal intellectuals more generally. Dollard and his generation all witnessed the bloody aftermath of the Great War, and all felt acutely the sting of racial reaction in the decade that followed. At the same time, they all were reared to believe that race prejudice was not an instinct, did not stem from racial difference itself, and was not endemic to a multi-racial polity. They knew that race prejudice was instead an amalgam of conflicting interests and psychological irrationality. The idea of “scapegoating” gave them a way to account for and to explain this reality at a moment when it needed explaining. In particular, the “scapegoating” theory of racism, like the idea that racism was a modern mythology, outlined in chapter two, provided a way of thinking about race prejudice and racial conflict that openly rejected the kinds of essentialism and determinism that had dominated racial discourse since the late nineteenth century—and that very much continued to hold sway over scientists, politicians and the general public in the 1940s.

In crucial ways, “scapegoating” interpretations of racism were inherently anti-racist. At a moment when the scientific bases for racial inequality were fast eroding, but were by no means gone, and when the star of cultural pluralism seemed to be rising as a beacon against both homogenizing modernization and the prospects of ‘race-war,’ the sense that the irrational violence of race prejudice stemmed from “frustration” or “fear,” and was a mutable expression of generic “aggression” or “hostility” generated by social change or economic deprivation offered the possibility that, with insight and intelligence, liberal social action might prevent history from repeating itself. This was why Gunnar



Myrdal deployed it in his analysis of the southern racial order in *An American Dilemma*. Myrdal recognized the utility of the idea that the hostility surrounding the southern “Negro problem” stemmed even in part from “scapegoating”—as his quote in the introduction, above, indicated. And, knowingly or not, Myrdal signaled Dollard’s influence in developing this line of thought with his choice of terms—the Swede referred to race prejudice as a form of “displaced aggression.”<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, the “scapegoating” theory of racism was also marked by a central, perhaps characteristic, indeterminacy or tension, one that structured the development of liberal anti-racist ideology. Dollard admitted that the line between “direct” and “displaced” aggression was often difficult to draw in observing actual social behavior; indeed, for him, “direct” conflict and “indirect” aggression were coterminous, even overlapping. And yet, the political, social, and economic implications of these two interpretations of race prejudice were nothing short of profound. To whatever extent “race prejudice” was rooted in conflicts of interest over political power and economic resources—as liberals and leftists assumed through much of the 1930s—attacking the “race problem” entailed direct substantive interventions into the economic and social structure of American life. Insofar as “race prejudice” was only function of racial “scapegoating”—of fears and frustrations that had little direct connections to “race” *per se*—then the “race problem” could be ameliorated through a more limited program of general social provision and the protection of minority civil rights. As the political realities of the 1940s began to take shape—and the ‘age of reform’ came to end—the significance of this indeterminacy would become clear.

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<sup>44</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, vol. 2, 598.

### *Hadley Cantril and the Politics of “Scapegoating”*

Dollard’s analysis was only one of a number of schemes for understanding race prejudice that followed the underlying logic of “scapegoating.” Dollard developed his “scapegoating” theory of racism from Freudian concepts, namely the turn toward ego psychology and the heightened attention paid to “aggression” and “destructiveness” in the human psyche. As such, Dollard thought that racial “scapegoating” was “normal,” which is to say that he thought that the need to have “scapegoats” was an ordinary, even universal one in organized social life. Social contexts could heighten or diminish the desire to scapegoat, but no imaginable social condition could obviate it. However, the use of the “scapegoating” concept as a tool for understanding racial conflict and race prejudice was not limited to Freudian acolytes. Indeed, partly in competition and partly in concert with Freudian concepts, the Harvard-trained psychologist and public opinion polling pioneer Hadley Cantril developed a different approach to the phenomenon of racial “scapegoating”—although at least one reviewer of Cantril’s book noted the high degree of similarity between his basic sense of the psychology of “scapegoating” and that of the “frustration-aggression” hypothesis.<sup>45</sup> And for Cantril, in contrast with Dollard, the major cases of “scapegoating” in the modern world were anything but normal.

Albert Hadley Cantril always wanted to know what people were thinking, and he made a career out of asking them. Born in Utah and raised in Wyoming—a state whose population surpassed one-hundred thousand just around the time of his birth in 1906—Cantril was a Westerner when that term still had a predominantly American meaning.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Dwight W. Chapman, “Review of Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 37, 2 (April, 1942): 273-6.

<sup>46</sup> Biographical information about Cantril is surprisingly sparse. For basic biographical material see Franz Samelson, “Hadley Cantril,” American National Biography Online, <http://www.anb.org>. For interpretive

And, perhaps it was Western taciturnity that made him want to ask people what they had on their minds. Whatever its origins, his interest received bountiful encouragement when he arrived in Hanover, New Hampshire in 1924—a state whose population was just shy of four-hundred fifty thousand when he arrived—and began taking courses in psychology. At Dartmouth, Cantril came under the sway of a promising, Harvard-trained psychologist named Gordon Allport, who had already started making a science out of asking people what they were thinking by reshaping social psychology as a study of ‘attitudes.’<sup>47</sup> After graduating in 1928, Cantril undertook a well-established tour of psychology credential-gathering: two years of graduate study in Berlin and Munich; completion of a PhD in psychology at Harvard (where Allport had relocated in the intervening years); temporary teaching positions at Dartmouth, Harvard, Columbia; and finally, a permanent position at Princeton, secured in 1936.

Within a decade of arriving at Princeton, Cantril had established himself as one of the nation’s leading psychologists and opinion pollsters, playing the academic counterpart to his friend, George Gallup, in interpreting America’s political mood to its leaders and itself. Cantril believed that, beyond strengthening democracy at home, good polling could also foster better international relations by helping countries learn each other’s intentions, thereby diminishing international suspicion. This belief brought to Cantril two kinds of attention in the post-War years. He was tapped by UNESCO to lead an interdisciplinary and politically ecumenical project to explore the “tensions that cause

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work, see Katherine Pandora, *Rebels Within the Ranks: Psychologists' Critique of Scientific Authority and Democratic Realities in New Deal America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, along with his brother Floyd, are generally credited with founding roles in setting the discipline of social psychology on the path of “attitudes,” including attitude scaling and change. See Kurt Danziger, *Naming the Mind*, chapter 8. See also Ian I.M. Nicholson, “‘A Coherent Datum of Perception’: Gordon Allport, Floyd Allport, and the Politics of ‘Personality,’” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 36, 4 (Fall 2000): 463-470.

war”—with the idea of preventing them.<sup>48</sup> And, it was this work that drew the ire, and investigative authority of the House Un-American Activities Committee. HUAC’s “suspicions” did not stick to the well-respected and well-connected Cantril. But, it may have played a part in his decision to leave Princeton in 1955 to found the Institute for International Social Research, a permanent organization for conducting and collecting polling data on issues of international importance—established with money from the internationally-minded Nelson Rockefeller.<sup>49</sup> But, this still laid in the future in the late 1930s, when Cantril turned his attention to a different kind of ‘political psychology.’

In 1941, Cantril published *The Psychology of Social Movements* in the hopes of providing the social psychologist’s insights to the rather bewildering and unprecedented movement of millions of people around the globe into mass political and social movements. He wanted to know why seemingly normal people joined up with groups founded to enact far-fetched utopian schemes, or took to blindly following some obscure leader. He wanted to find out what such movements meant to the people who joined them, what psychological function such movements filled. In *The Psychology of Social Movements*, then, Cantril offered up interpretations of the psychological dimensions of a handful of prominent social movements of the 1930s, including a Christian cult that called itself the Oxford Group, and the movement that took shape behind the physician Francis Townsend to establish a new national retirement scheme. But, Cantril anchored his study with two case studies in racism—the southern lynching party and the rise of Nazism. In doing so, he developed a distinct framework for analyzing racism as a form of collective

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<sup>48</sup> This project led to *Tensions that Cause Wars* (1950), whose table of contents included articles by Gordon Allport, Gilberto Freyre, Max Horkheimer, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Alexander Szalai, among others. See Hadley Cantril, ed., *Tensions that Cause Wars* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1950).

<sup>49</sup> Although he continued his involvement in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, which helped to start, the founding of the Institute also marked the end of his academic career.

action that cohered around racial “scapegoating,” one that connected the rise of race prejudice to the world-historical events that characterized the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>50</sup>

Cantril's interest in racial prejudice preceded his work on these racist “social movements” by several years. Cantril came into the study of social psychology in the early 1930s, at a moment when the Allport brothers, Floyd and Gordon, were successfully redefining the field itself as the study of attitudes, including attitudes about America’s various racial groups.<sup>51</sup> When Cantril moved to Princeton in 1936, he was met there by Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly, two students of Floyd Allport at Syracuse University, who had already undertaken a massive project to measure the “racial prejudices and racial stereotypes” of the Princeton student body.<sup>52</sup> Although Cantril did not publish work on “racial attitudes” during the 1930s, he nonetheless shared an abiding interest in the nature of race prejudice. Moreover, Cantril shared with his mentor, colleagues, and a host of other young psychologists a commitment to liberal social reform, including reform of race problems, and a strong sense of the role of the psychologist in fostering such reform. As such, he helped to found the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, mentioned above, and took on the editorship of its first annual yearbook, *Industrial Conflict: A Psychological Interpretation*.<sup>53</sup>

Possessed of decidedly radical sympathies and a gift for communicating complex

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<sup>50</sup> Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1941).

<sup>51</sup> On the Allport’s and the development of social psychology see Ian Nicholson, “‘A Coherent Datum of Perception’” and Ian A.M. Nicholson, “Gordon Allport, Character, and the ‘Culture of Personality,’ 1897–1937,” *History of Psychology* 1, 1 (February, 1998): 52-68.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly, “Racial Stereotypes of One Hundred College Students,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 28 (1933): 280-290. Besides its advances in methodology, this was a groundbreaking study that established, so far as American psychology was concerned, that racial attitudes formed in response to contact with stereotypes and the attitudes of other people rather than strictly through “contact” with other groups. Katz and Braly’s study became the first of what is commonly known as “the Princeton Trilogy,” with the second and third installments undertaken in 1951 and 1969.

<sup>53</sup> Hadley Cantril, ed., *Industrial Conflict: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: The Cordon Company, 1936).

ideas clearly, Cantril's work garnered attention well beyond the academy (including with HUAC, which would target him after the War). Cantril made a name for himself with his frequent radio broadcasts on topics of the day as well as for his widely-read interpretation of the panic touched off by Orson Welles's infamous broadcast, *Invasion from Mars*.<sup>54</sup> And, by the fall of 1940, as Cantril began to publish findings from this pioneering poll of public political sentiment, he had caught the eye of the President of the United States, who enlisted the young psychologist—secretly—to provide him with information about the American people's feelings about the War, the Nazis, and even himself. Even before becoming an advisor to Franklin Roosevelt, though—perhaps the first political consultant of his kind—Cantril's public profile was high enough to garner an invitation to sit on “a panel discussion on race and race prejudice” in the fall of 1939 arranged by the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom, an anti-fascist organization launched by Franz Boas and others a few years earlier.

The popularity of such panels from race experts grew through the 1930s, and exploded during the 1940s, but this particular gathering was anything but standard fare. The panel met in the “Hall of Science and Education” at the 1939 World's Fair in New York—the first such convocation explicitly dedicated to “the future,” perhaps because the organizers for that year's celebration had been decidedly less certain that America *had* a future than were their predecessors. On it, Cantril joined Boas, who spoke on anthropological bases of racial equality, and William Hamm, an educator and expert on tolerance educational programs. The starring role, though, went to Secretary of

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<sup>54</sup> Hadley Cantril, *Invasion from Mars* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1940). This book became the standard account of the Welles's broadcast and of the public reaction to it. Supposedly, the panic became something of an obsession to two dictators who developed a fascination of mass reactions, Adolph Hitler and Josef Stalin. It is quite likely that the primary source of their information was Cantril's book.

Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, who was mere months away from being selected to serve as FDR's Vice-President on the 1940 Democratic ticket. Speaking as a farmer and as someone well schooled in genetics, Wallace assured the people gathered there that all of humanity, without regard to race, was capable of sustaining democratic forms of government and ways of life. Indeed, much as he had across the country in the preceding few years, he spoke of the "Genetic Bases of Democracy," a phrase from which the panel took its title. But, he also spoke as the standard-bearer of the Popular Front, and spoke to the absolute centrality of anti-racism to that movement. Besides offering his insights into the psychology of race prejudice, then, Hadley Cantril was there to represent psychology as a whole, alongside an anthropologist and an educator, as part of the intellectual arm of Popular Front.<sup>55</sup>

Beginning with his panel discussion and culminating in his analysis of the psychology of lynching and Nazism, *Social Movements*, Cantril developed a dynamic framework for understanding racial behavior, including racial "scapegoating." Cantril built his framework with a number of intellectual tools, including the concept of "attitudes" as well as the analysis of mass communications messaging and propaganda he developed along with Gordon Allport. But, beyond these more narrowly focused studies of belief and expression, Cantril also borrowed heavily from his friend, colleague, and collaborator, Muzafer Sherif, one of the most innovative social psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using Sherif's foundational 1936 textbook, *The Psychology of Social Norms*, as a guide, Cantril embedded the psychology of racial animosity in wider systems of social meaning and social structure, lending his analysis a concreteness lacking in psychological

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<sup>55</sup> The panel proceedings were published by the committee as a pamphlet under the title "The Genetic Bases of Democracy," the same title of a speech and article that Wallace had toured the country giving. On Wallace's anti-racism see Vials, *Realism of the Masses*, introduction.

studies of racial attitudes.<sup>56</sup> The difference in Cantril's social psychological approach was embodied in his choice of the proper object of analysis: rather than individual attitudes accessed through questionnaires administered to college students, or case histories recorded from individuals—although he used both of these—Cantril took the measure of whole social movements. To do so, he read widely in the available historical and sociological materials, developing a detailed sense of the social, economic, and cultural context in which the individual operated.<sup>57</sup>

Before exploring the psychologies of southern racism and Nazism, Cantril laid out a general framework for understanding the psychology of social movements. Cantril began with a discussion of the “mental context” of the individual participant, which he defined as the generalized “frame of reference” and “standards of judgment” each person developed by way of “interiorizing” the “social norms” and “social values” of their culture. Turning to questions of “motivation in social life,” Cantril rejected theories rooted in some conception or other of “original energies,” including Freudian emphasis on the *id*. Instead, he favored a concept of motivation in which culturally inscribed values

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<sup>56</sup> Muzafer Sherif, *The Psychology of Social Norms*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936). They collaborated in 1945 on a retort to the Allportian concept of attitudes with *The Psychology of Ego-Involvement* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1947).

<sup>57</sup> The difference between the prevailing approach to “attitudes” and Sherif and Cantril's social psychology marks a key conceptual division in American social psychology. Put briefly, the main current of social psychology, that launched by Floyd and Gordon Allport and built around the collection and measurement of attitudes, holds that the “social” dimension of social psychology pertains exclusively to the object under consideration. Psychology is “social” when the individual is thinking about or acting towards some another person or group—a different racial group or member of a different racial group. By contrast, Sherif and Cantril (among a few others) held that social psychology was the study of the individual *acting as the member of a group*, regardless of the object in question. For a variety of reasons, the former conception of social psychology—that based on the study of attitudes and wholly eschewing any notion of a social self distinct from an individual self—quickly came to dominate the discipline of social psychology to the exclusion of the latter, more “social” conception. And, ironically enough, by becoming one of the most successful political pollsters of his day, Cantril helped to hasten the demise of his preferred model of social psychology. On the ‘disappearance’ of the social in American social psychology, and Cantril's place therein, see John D. Greenwood, *The Disappearance of the Social in American Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004)



became “ego-involved,” or stitched into each person’s sense of “self-regard” as the ego develops in its social context. The resulting “ego drives,” as Cantril called them, become “dynamic forces within the person,” driving him or her to pursue culturally relative values as if they were instinctive, and to defend social norms with the same ferocity with which they defended themselves.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Cantril’s was an inherently ‘social’ ego, constantly evaluating itself relative to commonly held social values, and thereby highly motivated by social status.<sup>59</sup> In addition to defending or advancing its social status, and alternately wrestling against and chasing after socially acceptable goals, Cantril’s ‘ego’ was constantly in search of meaning, of a coherent interpretation of the world around it. As he saw it, this “desire to obtain meaning, related as it generally [was] to the ego, motivated the individual to seek a solution, causes him to be dissatisfied, anxious, and bewildered until meaning is obtained.”<sup>60</sup> This innate desire for meaning, Cantril thought, was “an indispensable tool in our psychological kit” with which to account for the appeal of social movements.

Reflecting one of the prevailing critiques of modernity during the 1930s and 1940s, Cantril proposed that the psychological key to modern social movements was the breakdown of these elaborate “mental structures” in the face of “a chaotic external environment.” In these “critical situations,” as he called them, when social and economic conditions defy one’s interpretation of reality, when an “individual’s psychological world [is] violently jarred by worries, fears, anxieties, and frustrations, when he begins to question the norms and values which have become a part of him”—then such a person is poised to join a social movement. Further, he thought that if such a situation prevailed

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<sup>58</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 1-3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2.

“among large numbers of cultural group,” then the whole culture was in a “critical condition.”<sup>61</sup> In such situations, people fall into a state of “indecision and bewilderment,” thereby rendering them highly suggestible, vulnerable to the enticements of “the mob leader, the potential dictator, the revolutionary or religious prophet” or anyone else with a new message or way out.<sup>62</sup> Writing about the “The Kingdom of Father Divine,” Cantril noted that “Complexity, confusion, hopelessness, and purposelessness are changed into simple understanding, peace, happiness, and a faith in the abstract principles embodied in the person of “Father.”<sup>63</sup> The psychological rewards of joining such a movement in such a moment were evident.

Turning from the general to the specific, Cantril launched his analysis of the psychology of social movements with an examination of a pair of southern lynchings. Using the profusion of lynching studies published in the late 1920s and 1930s as his sources—including Walter White’s *Rope and Faggot* (1929), sociologist Arthur Raper’s groundbreaking *The Tragedy of Lynching* (1933), Frank Shay’s, *Judge Shay* (1938), and Erskine Caldwell’s vivid *Trouble in July* (1940)—Cantril framed “the lynching mob” as a kind of social movement.<sup>64</sup> In itself, this framing was original, if not inspired.

Cantril began by outlining the social and psychological “setting” of the lynch mob. He noted the “firmly established” fact that lynchings reflected the underlying economic conditions of the historical era in which they occurred. At times when slavery was under attack, or when African Americans “threatened the economic power of controlling interests by their organization and initiative,” lynchings served maintain

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<sup>61</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 61-2; 16; 64

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>63</sup> Hadley Cantril and Muzafer Sherif, “The Kingdom of Father Divine,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 33, 2 (April, 1938), 147.

<sup>64</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 86-87.

access to docile exploitable labor; at times when jobs were scarce, lynching was a way to intimidate and exclude “unnecessary competitors.”<sup>65</sup> Besides this economic context, Cantril drew out the cultural and psychological context. To keep African Americans as near as possible to the state of “bondage” in which they originally arrived, white southerners “erected [*sic*] a whole complex of cultural standards” and social norms.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, southern history was characterized by the “systematic perpetuation of rigidly established norms” to “insure the white man of the Negroes’ economic, political, and cultural servitude.” Virtually all white southerners ‘interiorized’ these “cultural norms,” developing a common “frame of reference,” namely that “the white man must keep *his* place” over and above the Negro.

To Cantril, herein laid the essence of the psychology of “race prejudice.” White southerners—and whites more generally—did not feel animosity toward blacks because they thought Negroes were lazy or criminal or smelled badly or were naturally servile. Nor did their animosity stem naturally from some innate sense of economic competition. Rather, southern whites felt “prejudice” towards blacks because of their “ego involvement” in this frame of reference of *white supremacy*. Having “interiorized” the cultural standard of white supremacy, southern whites experienced any violation of those social norms as a personal threat to their own social status. Moreover, they felt such threats to white social status were threats to their sense of self, their “self-regard.”<sup>67</sup> Cantril recognized that this sense of threatened status varied by class: the southern patrician was unlikely to feel under attack from the same behavior as the “poor-white tenant farmer” who regarded his “color” as “one of the few remaining signs his”

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<sup>65</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 83-4; 94.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-112.

superiority. In Cantril's reading, then, "race prejudice" and outbreaks of racial violence erupted from the nexus of white social status, psychological expectations, and contingent historical events.<sup>68</sup>

Although, broadly speaking, lynching was the response of white southerners to violations of the social norms of white supremacy, Cantril did not think that this alone made lynching into a "social movement." Indeed, no single proximate "crime" could mobilize hundreds, even thousands of people to such vile acts, no matter how egregious—no "crime" alone could turn a vigilante action into a movement. What made modern day lynchings different, he thought, what made them into full bore social movements was the broader historical moment in they took place. As he saw it, southern whites were not responding to any one assault on the stanchions of white supremacy; they were responding to the fact that their entire world was under attack by the forces of modernization. "The conditions that jeopardize the status of the white man," and thus provide the emotional fuel for the lynching pyre, were "extremely complex," ranging from the black activism, to changes in "public opinion" on the proper status of African Americans, to macroeconomic forces like technological advances, universal education, population shifts, trade policy, and, of course, war. It was these forces that marked the condition of the contemporary South as a "critical situation."

The effect of this situation on the psyches of white southerners was clear. Given the lower standard of education, the depth of fundamentalist religious sentiment, and the

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<sup>68</sup> Cantril's focus on social status, and the emotional attachment to the social status of one's group foreshadowed by almost two decades the path breaking work of sociologist Herbert Blumer, who was the first Chicago trained sociologist to break out of the "race relations" model laid out by Robert E. Park. For Cantril, "race prejudice," even attitudes, the result of the 'interiorization' of social norms and standards born of *social conditions*, which is to say that the psychology of race prejudice was derivative of rather than a driver of social conflict. See Herbert Blumer, "Racial Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position," *Pacific Sociological Review* 1, 1 (Spring, 1958): 3-7.

tradition of political demagoguery that pervaded the South, the “more remote and fundamental causes” of these prevailing conditions “remain vague” in the mind of the white southerner, abstractions with little concrete meaning. “The Negro,” by contrast, “the Negro—not a decrease in the demand for cotton, soil exhaustion, or government regulations, or taxes—is the ‘reason’ why his income is low, his position insecure.” And, as such, lynching a “Negro” appeared as a simple, common sense ““solution”” to the problems wracking the South, one that harmonized perfectly with the prevailing frame of reference of most white southerners, and thereby aroused little cognitive resistance.<sup>69</sup> In Cantril’s telling, then, “The Negro” served as “the scapegoat” for the white South at a moment when its foundational “social norms” and “frame of reference” were being eroded by forces and events that white southerners could not see, much less control. Ironically, Cantril’s work suggested, white southerners were lynching blacks in the United States in the 1930s because, although only dimly aware of why, they were losing the way of life that allowed them to lynch the Negro in the first place.

The contrast between Cantril’s conception of southern racism and the vision promulgated by Dollard in *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937) offers distinct perspective on the inherent tension in anti-racist thinking between white racial prejudice and the nature of modernity. While he noted throughout his study the ways in which the Great Depression and the New Deal were changing the South, Dollard maintained that the social structure that governed life in the South, and the psychology of white supremacy that enforced its strictures remained largely impervious to such forces. At the same time, though, by indicating that the modern, industrialized, democratic North pointed the way forward toward ‘racial progress’ he preserved the hope that the processes

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<sup>69</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 111-113.

of modernization would ultimately dissolve white “race prejudice.” Cantril’s vision gave the lie to such hopes. In his analysis, the encroaching forces of modernization *heightened* white loyalty to their social order, and *intensified* the psychological needs that “race prejudice” satisfied.

Cantril’s sense of this relationship between the social forces buffeting the South and white racial prejudice exposed a key underlying weakness of the “scapegoating” concept. The “scapegoating” concept worked to separate out essentialist elements of racial conflict from those that could be amended, and to show that the ‘real’ causes of race conflict belonged to the latter category—economic deprivation, political failure, social disruptions like Wars and Depressions—rather than to racial identity itself. If these could be addressed, prejudice would be diminished, even controlled; and, by implication, the pursuit of more just social arrangement could be advanced. Cantril’s insight challenged that assumption. “Race prejudice” was still motivated by underlying causes, but for him the primary bases of racial hostility in the South was the impending breakdown of the southern racial order under the strains of modernity. The only way to diminish the intensity of white southern racism, and to diminish the incidence of lynching in the near-term, was address the source of white anxieties—in this case, to sure-up the social system of white supremacy itself. Modernization, so long the hope of liberals as the way out of the problems of prejudice, would only strengthen the hold of racism on the southern white psyche. Unsurprisingly, Cantril did not draw out these implications, and neither did most liberal social and behavioral scientists in the 1940s. After all, if “scapegoating” did not provide a way out of the liberal bind on the problem of race prejudice, perhaps there was no way out at all?

Cantril's analysis of Nazism, naturally, followed very similar lines. With the defeat of the Kaiser's Army, Cantril thought, "whole pattern of standards which constituted the Germany of 1918" collapsed, inaugurating "a critical period when old norms, old cultural standards, were no longer able to provide the framework necessary" for "adjustment" to the world.<sup>70</sup> In the succeeding decade, as "government followed government, plan followed plan, winter followed winter," the myriad economic, political and international uncertainties that marked the everyday lives of the German people "hung like heavy clouds over the heads of the bewildered citizen."<sup>71</sup> Although they each experienced these upheavals according to their own "frames of reference," the various classes in German society—the landed aristocracy or *Junkers*, the industrialists, the middle-class, the workers, the peasants, and the youth—all felt their statuses under threat from one direction or another, and thus all felt dissatisfied with the "new superstructure," and new "norms" of the Weimar Republic. This dissatisfaction with the infant democracy paved the way for anti-democratic reaction. And, as Germany finally sunk into the Depression, Germans had a stark realization: "there was potential abundance, that the machinery existed to produce food, clothing, and other necessities, if only someone would take hold and run it. Certainly nothing worse could happen than had already happened."<sup>72</sup>

In this context, most of the segments of the German people saw in Hitler and in Nazism a complete break from the wearying political and economic contests of the 1920s. More than Communism or liberal democracy or the rule of the old elite, Nazism offered the people the "possibility of constructing a new framework that would solve

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<sup>70</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 266.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

their own problems.” Rejecting what he thought were over-determined interpretations of Nazism coming from Marxists and psychoanalysts, Cantril offered a more banal theory of the appeal of Nazism. Beneath their new social vision for the German people, the Nazis appealed to the desire for a better quality of life, self-interest, and, of course, status. This entailed crushing communism for the sake of the industrial elites, breaking inflation for the *petite bourgeoisie*, protecting the land rights of the *Junkers*, and for the members of “underprivileged classes” who did not like their status in the “existing social order,” facilitating a reevaluation of their social status on grounds of race. Combined with skillful propaganda and well-orchestrated political theatre, ruthlessly executed power politics against the opposition—and heavy doses of “terrorism”—this formula enabled Hitler to achieve some level of political legitimacy.

Of course, the Nazis used “race” as the glue to hold this scheme together. Cantril noted that, with its vision of pan-Germanism twinned with an image of “the Jew as an enemy,” Nazi racial doctrine “reaffirmed latent but unexpressed values held by wide segments of the population.” For his part, Hitler knew what enemies to choose. By “intensifying this common frame of reference, by making it a respectable social value in larger and larger groups, the Nazis were able to ascribe to the Jews multitude of evils...” But, he also recognized that “the common man is inspired to action when he can incorporate as one of his ego values some abstract or specific principle—some principle which may itself be illogical, pre-scientific, incapable of accurate definition, but which the individual thinks he understands and which he thinks will, if achieved, bring him the kind of world he wants.” As such, Nazi racial doctrine served to reestablished German



status, for anyone not a Jew was automatically an Aryan, and thus superior.<sup>73</sup> But, more to the point, it identified a ‘cause’ for popular discontent, a simplified story that could turn “confusion into conviction, despair into direction” but supplying a new frame of reference.<sup>74</sup> Attacking Jews, then, empowered people and gave them a sense that they were doing something to improve their lot and to return Germany to its former glory. Whereas white southerners scapegoated southern blacks out of feelings of fear (of loss of status and loss of way of life), Germans scapegoated Jews as a means of restoring a former level of status that had been robbed from them by defeat and that eluded them in democracy.<sup>75</sup>

Cantril’s conception of the psychology of racial scapegoating and its role in the genesis of racist social movements betrayed a deep, underlying tension that ran through much of liberal social thought about race in the 1930s and 1940s. As Cantril saw it, “Our culture had been in an unusual state of confusion at least since the First World War, and more especially since” the Great Depression. Facilitated by the spread of mass communications technology, particularly the radio, people were beginning to “learn diverging opinions,” and were using these new ideas to change the way they organized their social, political, and economic lives—including family and gender dynamics. “The result,” he thought, was “that fewer people in all walks of life are less sure of many of their older norms than their fathers were.”<sup>76</sup> In short, the United States as a whole was in a “critical situation,” or very close to one. Cantril saw in this relentless modernization of

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<sup>73</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 241.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-5. Besides Jews’ historical position, they were of higher status than the average German citizen, making their destructing especially satisfying.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

American life great potential, as did many of his ilk.<sup>77</sup> He knew that during such times, societies produced revolutionary thinkers, artists, scientists, and leaders who did great things. Like Benedict, Barzun, Radin, and Seligmann, who saw in the crises of modernity the opportunity of a broad reconfiguration of modern American culture, Cantril recognized that massive social and cultural disruptions opened new possibilities. But, he also saw that Nazism and lynch mobs and fundamentalist religious cults took shape in such moments to answer questions to which people could not respond with what they knew. He saw that the people were succumbing to the bromides of fanatics because, in times of great uncertainty, any answer was better than none at all.

Cantril offered no course of action or plan of reform for how to deal with either Nazism or lynching, or for any of the other social movements whose generation and trajectory he plotted. But, his book carried a strong bent toward political action, one becoming a liberal behavioral scientist, but distinct from the ideas of other leftist intellectual—like, for instance, Ashley Montagu. Montagu, as we will see, suggested a course of cultural reconstruction to bring Western civilization into better alignment with the cooperative capacities in human nature. Cantril drew different conclusions from his research. His experiences researching social movements and conducting polls of the opinions of everyday Americans led him to believe that people wanted change, wanted new ways of living, *but not too new*, and not too far beyond the scope of their existing ‘frame of reference.’ Most people do “not usually want to overthrow most of the culture. [They want] rather to modify it, to amplify the meanings of some old concepts, to adjust a

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<sup>77</sup> He cited the psychoanalytical literary critic and intellectual Kenneth Burke, a great influence of many, who argued that susceptibility to suggestion under critical situation *not* different among social or ideological groups. Indeed, psychological traits or personality types not correlated with political ideology. Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 69.

few traditional standards to modern conditions.” Further, Cantril noted that people did not connect their specific, local concerns with more general causes. As such, even as they strongly supported calls to “improve the lot of the sharecropper, or take the politics out of city government,” they refused to recognize that these “evils... are intrinsically related to a whole system of ownership and distribution which they strongly defend.”<sup>78</sup> As to whether or not such constitutional moderation could weather the extremes of the modern world, Cantril did not say.

### *Ashley Montagu’s Anthropology of Modern Racism*

Possessed of significant intellectual ambition, both Dollard and Cantril aimed to build sturdy analytical frameworks for understanding human behavior, ones that could carry real weight in practical affairs. They differed in their ideas about the roots of “scapegoating,” with Dollard pointing to features endemic to the human experience while Cantril focused on popular responses to specific social and political failures—or, rather the failures of established elites to respond to changes in modern life in ways that satisfied popular expectations. As such, Dollard’s work evinced a certain fatalism—marking him as closer in temperament to Freud and his Continental legatees than Dollard’s own co-national psychoanalytic intellectuals—while Cantril’s fit well with the tone of managed optimism that suffused the New Deal. Both men, however, saw race prejudice as just one (particularly significant) type of behavior, and saw the study of racial “scapegoating” as one species of a larger genus of social psychology. By contrast, M. F. Ashley Montagu, a Boasian cultural anthropologist and self-identified anti-racist intellectual, came to the problem of racial “scapegoating” directly from his consideration of the problems of “race” itself. And, for him, the problems of “race” and race prejudice

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<sup>78</sup> Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements*, 13-14.

stemmed from defining features of Western society and culture.

Born Israel Ehrenberg to eastern European émigré parents in 1905, Montague Francis Ashley Montagu traced his interest in “race” to two defining features of his childhood in the Jewish ghetto of London’s working-class East End. Living near the docklands of the imperial capital in the years before the Great War, Montagu witnessed incredible human diversity teeming all around him. At the same time, he felt the sting of anti-Semitism directed towards him by his working-class neighbors. By the time Montagu enrolled at University College London in 1922, he had already had been called to the study of anthropology and psychology, and had already camouflaged himself by changing names—University College’s self-proclaimed identity as a place unsullied by prejudice against race, religion, or creed having impressed the young Israel rather less than its founders had hoped. Some fifteen years later, with his doctorate in cultural anthropology from Columbia University in hand—he first arrived in the States in 1927, and settled permanently in 1930—Montagu counted among his mentors physical anthropologist (and notorious racist) Sir Arthur Keith, British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, and of course, his thesis directors Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas. Further, an autodidact by nature, he leveraged his formal university studies to great effect, mastering enough anatomy to teach at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, enough psychoanalysis to publish in Harry Stack Sullivan’s journal *Psychiatry*, and enough statistics, genetics, and population studies to co-author scholarly articles with the ground-breaking evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Despite being one of the most successful intellectuals and popularizers of science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no biography of Ashley Montague exists. The only significant historical treatment of Montagu is Michelle Brattain, “Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Race to the Postwar Public,” *American Historical Review* 112, 5 (December 2007), which considers his central role in the effort

Montagu brought much of this expertise to bare on the problem of race and race prejudice in 1942, when he first published his landmark *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*.<sup>80</sup> By the early 1940s, Montagu was well-practiced in constructing anti-racist arguments, having written his first tract against the “colour bar” in Britain in the mid-1920s. Unsurprisingly given his place within the community of Boasian anti-racist anthropologists, Montagu hit on a number of same themes that ran through the histories of race outlined in chapter 2. But, unlike Radin or Benedict, Montagu’s fluency with the biological and morphological arguments about race matched—and perhaps even exceeded—Boas’s own. Indeed, Montagu meant *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* to advance on Boas’s work with anatomical measurement and physical anthropology by introducing a popular audience to population dynamics, genetics, and the finery of human biological evolution. Drawing insights from the incorporation of Mendelian genetics into the theory of Darwinian evolution (what would come to be called ‘the modern evolutionary synthesis’), Montagu saw that the overlapping physical and mental differences that gave rise to the concept of “race” in the first place did not conform to even the most rudimentary understanding of genetic inheritance. As such, “race”—and Montagu too placed it in quotes—was little more than a word standing for a concept that “from the outset begs the whole question.”<sup>81</sup>

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to establish an anti-racist baseline in the biological study of racial groups against a resurgent collection of racial conservatives who bristle at Montagu’s belief in the cooperative nature of human beings; and Joanne Meyerowitz’s recent “‘How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Constructionist Thought,” *Journal of American History* 96, 4 (March 2010), which profitably contrasts Montagu’s thought on sexuality and race.

<sup>80</sup> M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). Montagu republished *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* in 1943, then released a revised and expanded edition in 1945 that included more citation material, new chapters on the connections between race and blood, among others, as well as a few passages clarifying key points in his argument. All notes are to the 1942 edition unless otherwise specified.

<sup>81</sup> Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, 7.

Recognizing that anthropologists had long been content busying themselves with a concept that had no correspondence to reality in the first place, Montagu drew two conclusions. Firstly, he thought that both anthropologists, as well as the broader collection of intellectuals and scientists interested in questions of “race,” should abandon the concept all together in favor of more precise labels. In place of “race” he suggested that biologists and physical anthropologists use the term “ethnic group” to identify groups that held certain phenotypic similarity.<sup>82</sup> And, for cultural anthropologists, sociologists and other social and behavioral scientists, he proposed that groups heretofore identified as “races” were more accurately labeled as “castes.” “Caste” groups, Montagu argued, were held apart by the dominant groups in society for social not “biological” reasons. Indeed, of all the factors that determined the “social relations” between caste groups, including social stratification and economic competition, none of these were “racial” in nature. Secondly, echoing sentiments voiced by Boas, Radin, Benedict, and the anti-racist intellectuals in chapter 2, he determined that “race” was “a myth and a delusion.”<sup>83</sup> As such, he thought that the problems of race were just as much the provenance of the “historian and psychologists as for the geneticist.”<sup>84</sup> Or, in his case, multi-disciplinary autodidacts with anti-racist axes to grind.

Building off of these two key insights, Montagu classed the prevailing popular concept of “race” as a “cultural artifact” of the modern Western world. Like his fellow

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<sup>82</sup> In suggesting a wholesale abandonment of the race concept in favor of “ethnic,” Montagu anticipated one of the key intellectual countercurrents in American racial discourse. This strategy of anti-racist thought was brought to conceptual fruition in the work of intellectual historian David Hollinger notion of the “post-ethnic,” and his use of the blanket term “ethnoracial” as a means of collapsing the normative distinction between “ethnic” differences and “racial” differences. Of course, when Montagu first proposed the idea of abandoning “race” for “ethnic,” this distinction was not so normative. See David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1995]).

<sup>83</sup> Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, 64.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, ix. Quoting Julian Huxley's forward to the same.

Boasians, Montagu thought of “race” as both a widely-shared pattern of misperception, as well as the ideological lens through which modern white people looked out on the world they dominated and naturalized that domination. As such, he traced its origins back to the first efforts to rationalize the institution of slavery in the face of the first sustained abolitionist assaults of the early nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup> More specifically, he thought that “The idea of ‘race’ was not so much the deliberate creation of a caste seeking to defend its privileges against what was regarded as an inferior social caste, as it was the strategic elaboration of erroneous notions which had been long been held by many slaveholders.”<sup>86</sup> The physical differences between Europeans and Africans (as well as Native Americans) provided slaveholders with “a convenient peg upon which to hang” a range of arguments as to why the social inferiority, cultural alien-ness, and physical markers were signs of inherent biological differences called “race” that, in turn, justified and maintained the original social difference. Because “race” was such “an easily grasped mode or reasoning,” it was quickly absorbed into science and into the enlightenment impulse for categorization. But, Montagu observed, even as putative scientists took up the issue of “race,” the “emotional atmosphere” from which the concept itself emerged—the defense of unjustifiable exploitation—continued to shroud any and all discussions of the idea. This atmosphere—”It might almost be called ‘the atmosphere of the scapegoat,’ or possibly ‘the atmosphere of frustration or fear of frustration’”—always made dispassionate thinking about “race” difficult.<sup>87</sup>

Although ideological in origin, notions about “race” inevitably seeped into the broader culture, becoming part of the worldview of everyday people, and thus identifying

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<sup>85</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, 21-22.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

racial groups as acceptable scapegoats. “Race” may have been “a myth and a delusion,” but Montagu knew that it resonated strongly in the minds of the average Americans. He deigned to explain why. Americans, he thought, had been “emotionally conditioned” to believe in “race,” much as their forbearers had been conditioned to believe in ghosts. But, more to the point, “race” shaped the way people saw the world. The “average person in our society,” Montagu opined, sees that “certain ethnic groups possess physical and mental traits which differ from his own,” and “concludes that these physical and mental traits are somehow linked together, and that they are immutable.” Plied with “Vague notions about a unilinear evolution,” he believes “that such ‘races’ are ‘lower’ in the ‘scale’ of evolution than is the group to which he belongs.” Not only were such ideas about human evolution errant, Montagu thought, but the very act of seeing “race” itself was a mistake. And yet, “‘Race’ is a very definite entity to him, and all the intellectual supports for his conception of it are there ready to hand; newspapers, periodicals, books, publicists, politicians and others are all there to tell him the same story.” Through this process, “race” gained considerable emotional importance to people, and thus took on the status of a social fact—shaping peoples’ behavior or serving as rationalization—despite its utter lack of scientific grounding.<sup>88</sup>

The invention and dissemination of the “race” concept was pivotal to Montagu’s theory of racism, but he did not think that ideas or culture itself drove people to racial conflict. Having laid out his theory of “race,” then, Montagu turned his attention to the social and psychological bases of race prejudice. Echoing the baseline of economic determinism that had gained wide currency in leftist and liberal political and intellectual circles in the 1930s—the same one that Klineberg gave voice to in his social psychology

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<sup>88</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, 64.



text book—Montagu noted the role of “economic factors” and “social stratification” in race prejudice. Writing of the West as a whole, including its colonial holdings, he observed that socio-economic systems characterized by the “an extreme division of men into classes whose interests are necessarily opposed,” and “organized upon an extremely competitive basis,” created ample motivation for “race prejudice.” Economic self-interest proved quite conducive to erecting “racial barriers” for the “the social and economic disfranchisement of helpless groups.”<sup>89</sup> Along these lines, he cited Nazi exclusion of Jews and expropriation of their wealth, the prevalence of prejudice against the Chinese and Japanese on the West coast of the U.S., and the growing conflict in the South as African Americans increasingly entered into competition for jobs. By pitting groups against each other under conditions of differential social status—and here Montagu thought that “class” differed little from “race”—such a system inevitably generated abundant “‘race’ antagonism.”<sup>90</sup>

As significant as material factors were, though, Montagu did not think that they were either an “absolutely necessary or sufficient” cause of “‘racial’ problems.” Taking the Soviet Union as his example—an example that virtually every Popular Front anti-racist cited until the mid-1940s to illustrate the potential for state mitigation of ethnic conflicts—he maintained that so-called racial groups could learn to cooperate in the face of economic hardship if they shared a common goal. Likewise, he thought that, although “a reorganization of our economic system” would certainly help in solving the problem of race prejudice—and he advocated such reorganization—race prejudice could prevail

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<sup>89</sup> Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* (1945), 70; 81.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

even under ideal economic conditions.<sup>91</sup> In search of a middle ground between the economic determinism prevalent on the Left during the 1930s and the kind of racial determinism that marked the Right, Montagu grounded his theory of racism in the idea of racial “scapegoating.” Put succinctly, the irreducible basis of race prejudice, he thought, was an underlying impulse of “aggressiveness” in the individual, born of frustrations supplied by social and economic conditions, and directed by “cultural factors” into “channels leading to ‘race’ hostility.”<sup>92</sup>

In the central chapter of *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, Montagu turned his attention to what he thought were the crucial, and “almost always overlooked” “psychological factors” of the “‘race’ problem.”<sup>93</sup> The pivot-point in Montagu’s theory of racism was the individual “scapegoating” psyche. Drawing off of the same Freudian notions that Dollard did—indeed, recommending *Frustration and Aggression* for “interesting treatments of this view”—Montagu thought that the first layers of human “aggressiveness” were laid down during the childhood processes of socialization. “Parents, nurses, teachers, or whoever else participate[d] in the [socializing] process,” he thought, “By depriving the infant, and later the child, of all those means of satisfaction which it seeks—the nipple, the mother’s body, uncontrolled freedom to excrete, to suck, the freedom to cry at will, to scream and shout”—“piled” frustration upon frustration within the child’s psyche. Such frustrations, of course, “lead to resentment, to fear, to hatred and aggressiveness.”<sup>94</sup> As a point of clarity, Montagu maintained that such “aggressiveness” was not the “cause of ‘race’ prejudice, but merely represent[ed] a

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<sup>91</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, 77

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 7, 87-96.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

motive force, or affective energy.” “The individual exhibits ‘race’ prejudice,” he continued, “because it affords him a means of easing certain tensions within himself; because he is happiest when he is most freely able to release those tensions.”<sup>95</sup> The actual “channel” into which people chose to pour their “aggressiveness” was carved out by culture. Unlike Dollard, though—and foreshadowing the turn to ‘diaperology’ and ‘momism’ that characterized post-war analyses of social problems—Montagu thought that “aggressiveness” could be moderated through better child-rearing practices.<sup>96</sup> He thought that such aggressiveness could be redirected “towards ends of constructive value” through the inculcation of humanistic values.<sup>97</sup>

Far from reducing “the ‘race’ problem” down to these “psychological factors,” Montagu connected the psychology of “scapegoating” to the larger structures of Western political, social, and economic life. Why, he asked, was “race prejudice” so “easily generated” in American society? For an answer, Montagu returned to the economy, but under different auspices. He did not imagine the economy primarily as the site of interracial competition or a field on which racial groups fought for scarce social resources, as had long been standard in considerations of racial conflict in American social thought. Rather, he imagined “economic factors” as frustrating conditions—the most significant such conditions—that generated widespread “aggressiveness.” The prevalence of racial “scapegoating” in America, then, stemmed from the fact that “our society is socially and economically so organized as to be continually productive of frustrations in the individual.” In this context, “race prejudice” represented merely “the

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<sup>95</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, 88.

<sup>96</sup> On the turn toward ‘Momism’ and the associated development of national character studies see Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1998), Chapter 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

easiest and psychologically most satisfying” outlet for aggression identified by culture and sanctioned by society.<sup>98</sup> Sounding a more materialist note a few years later, Montagu specified that “In an economic organization of society which is always characterized by the presence of one crisis or another, with its attendant unemployment in the industries involved, the aggrieved part of the population is easily led to believe” that a chosen racial scapegoat is the cause of their problems.<sup>99</sup>

By highlighting the role of “competitiveness” in generating racial conflict, Montagu connected his analysis of racism to a broader critique of American capitalism and social structure. In part, Montagu’s thinking reflected the ideas of the neo-Freudian turn, “culture and personality” movement, and “dynamic sociology” that infused his intellectual milieu, but with which he was never formally associated.<sup>100</sup> Montagu thought that the essential psychological experience of modern Americans—rather than the “isolation and powerlessness” that Erich Fromm outlined in his path breaking *Escape from Freedom* (1941), or the psychological regression in the face of rapid social change witnessed by Franz Alexander in *Our Age of Unreason* (1942), or the proliferation of “neurotic personalities” produced by the modern anxiety, as Karen Horney saw in *The Neurotic Personality in Our Time* (1937)—was one of frustration born of confronting an economic system that was fundamentally inhospitable to the human need for cooperation. Drawing also on critique of capitalism laid out by a young, Harvard University-trained sociologist named Robert Merton—who would go on to coin ideas like ‘self-fulfilling

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<sup>98</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, 92.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, (1945), 87.

<sup>100</sup> “Dynamic sociology” was the name given to the style of analysis practiced by the collected C&P, neo-Freudian, and Frankfurt School theorists by Franz Alexander in the second edition of *Our Age of Unreason* (1951). Alexander does not mention Montagu, perhaps because by 1950 he had become prominently linked to the UNESCO effort to establish an orthodox position on the science of race.

prophecy,' 'unintended consequences,' and 'role model,' among other pieces of popular social thought—Montagu posited that the radical disjuncture between the values of success extolled by American culture and the opportunities to achieve such success available in American economic and social structures generated continuous frustrations.<sup>101</sup>

Rounding out his analysis of the contemporary moment, Montagu thought that the need to find an outlet for one's aggressive impulses made people vulnerable to "cultural manipulation" by self-interested political elites. "Race" survived in Western culture after its ideological origins in slavery were relegated to the dustbin of history because "in our society there exist powerful groups of men who for their own interest and in order to maintain their power must maintain divisions between men."<sup>102</sup> This "regrettable discovery"—that utilizing the physical and cultural differences between groups, in conjunction with the "psychophysical energies which, in most people, overtly find expression in some form of aggressiveness," enabled social elites "to evade the consequences of one's own conduct by attributing them to the conduct of some other group"<sup>103</sup>—gave the "race" concept its staying power. As had been the case when the Romans threw Christians to the lions, Montagu thought, leaders in modern western societies provided their people with "socially sanctioned outlet[s] for their pent-up feelings" in the form of racial scapegoats.<sup>104</sup> Whether it took the form of Southern Negrophobia, Anti-Semitism from South Africa to Germany, Nativism, or even evocations of the "the white man's burden," or "the rising tide of color," political

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<sup>101</sup> Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, 70

<sup>102</sup> M.F. Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* (1945), 87.

<sup>103</sup> Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, 82.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 83. Montagu repeated the characteristic liberal elision of 17<sup>th</sup> century conflicts between religious groups and modern conflicts between races.

elites cynically deployed “race” to direct the public’s need for a scapegoat toward ends that advanced their own domination.<sup>105</sup>

Throughout *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, Montagu evinced a subtle, rigorous, and decidedly materialist understanding of the “general pattern of racism,” one that saw the “scapegoating” white psyche as a tool in a class project, as the link between political and economic power brokers and racial ideology. Looking at the events that led to the internment of the West coast Japanese and Japanese-Americans—an account he drew from the reportage and analysis of leftist intellectual and future editor of *The Nation*, Carrey McWilliams—he showed how established political and economic powers mobilized cultural resources to advance their own narrow interests by capitalizing on the psychic needs of everyday people for simple explanations and easy outlets for their pent-up aggressions. Such an analysis suggested—indeed, demanded—a need to confront the arrangements of political and economic power in society.

Inaugurating a pattern that replicated itself widely through the 1940s, Montagu offered up a prescription that utterly failed to match the scope of the problem as he defined it. He suggested economic reform of the kind implemented by the New Deal to reduce the amount of frustration extant in society, plus long-term education reform. No *naïf*, Montagu stopped short of suggesting that education against race was liable to be successful. Indeed, given the emotional roots of the belief in “race,” he thought that such direct efforts would largely fail. Instead, he suggested anti-racist education move toward inculcating “cooperation” as a social value. “Cooperation,” he thought, could be an equally satisfactory response to aggressive impulses. Suggesting a kind of ‘moral equivalent of “scapegoating,” to borrow from William James, Montagu indicated that

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<sup>105</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth* (1945), 87.

“The attack upon some social problem requiring solution is in every way a far more satisfactory outlet for aggressiveness than an attack upon other human beings. Clearly, then, it is what is offered culturally as the most suitable object for the release of these aggressive tendencies that is the primarily important fact.”<sup>106</sup> Ever the optimist, Montagu offered up his thoughts on the prospects for this kind of ‘cooperative’ cultural reform in opposition to the much more widely held sentiment that man was an aggressive animal. As the English novelist and intellectual—and brother to anthropologist Julian Huxley—Aldous Huxley articulated the problem in the forward to *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, “Cooperation may produce a mild emotional glow; but the indulgence of aggressiveness can be the equivalent of a drinking-bout or sexual orgy.”<sup>107</sup> On principle, Montagu disagreed, but he also knew even creating such an ‘emotional glow’ would prove a tremendous challenge.

When Hadley Cantril’s mentor at Harvard, Gordon Allport, penned his forward to the pamphlet, *ABC’s of Scapegoating* in the fall of 1943, the stakes of America’s race problem had never been higher. Vicious riots in the strategic naval port of Los Angeles and in Detroit, the very ‘arsenal of democracy’ itself, brought home to the American people the threat that racial violence posed to the war effort—and the nation. For the sociologists Alfred McClung Lee and Norman D. Humphrey, whose *Race Riot: Detroit, 1943* was published only a few months after the fires went out, and split the difference between journalistic reportage and social scientific analysis, there was little doubt that the riots were outbursts of white racial “scapegoating.” The riots sparked a broad-based

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<sup>106</sup> Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, 85.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

movement for “civic unity,” one in which social and behavioral scientists, educators, ecumenical religious organizations, and various other citizens groups organized to spread anti-racist propaganda, promote “intercultural” education, and prevent future conflict. Largely through revived appeals to the kind of cultural pluralism that came into its own in the 1930s—that we were “Americans All, Immigrants All,” as one popular radio program put it—the goal of this movement was to reduce “prejudice” and increase “tolerance” through promoting “understanding” between groups.<sup>108</sup> Published first by the YMCA of Chicago, and later by the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’irith, Allport’s pamphlet hit exactly the right note between scientific expertise and moral suasion that this movement played.

Written in a clear, accessible style and studded with everyday examples, *ABC’s of Scapegoating* nevertheless reflected many of the insights generated by Dollard, Montagu, Cantril, and others. Indeed, it presented a conceptual map to the “scapegoating” theory of racism, with individual chapters on “motives” for scapegoating, the “sources of race prejudice in the child,” “the victim,” “forms of scapegoating,” the particular dangers of “scapegoating in Wartime,” and, of course “methods for combating scapegoating.”<sup>109</sup> The territory Allport mapped out looked very much the same: social conditions in the form of wartime scarcities and anxieties created insecurity and fear, and thus hostility; patterns of

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<sup>108</sup> On the development of the “civic unity” movement in response to the riots of the early 1940s, and its complement by organizations of Jewish anti-Racism, see Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin* (1964ed.), 17-22, Leah Gordon, “The Question of Prejudice,” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2007), chapter 5, Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). On the development of the second wave of the cultural pluralism movement, and its mobilization for War, see Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Diane Selig, *American All: The Cultural Gifts Movement* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2008), Philip Gleason, “Americans All: World War II and the Shaping of American Identity,” *Review of Politics* 43, 4 (October, 1981).

<sup>109</sup> Allport, *ABC’s*, 3.



culture in the form of “racial attitudes” and stereotypes identified scapegoats; people scapegoated racial minority groups to release aggressions built up in their psyches; demagogues sought to exploit such needs to advance their personal lusts for power. Furthermore, Allport agreed that creating a climate of economic and social ‘security’ through New Deal legislation was the foundation for how to address the problems of race in the 1930s. Given its form, style, and source, *ABC’s* represented the arrival of “scapegoating” as an official theory for explaining the causes and consequences of “race prejudice” to the general public. But, at the same time, it also represented a crucial narrowing of the concept.

Although they came to the question of “scapegoating” from different angles, Dollard, Montagu, and Cantril each sought to locate the individual scapegoating psyche within its larger cultural matrix, and to show how scapegoating was a response to specific social contexts. Indeed, this tripartite analysis of acts of racial “scapegoating”—laying the cultural milieu and the proximate social context over the individual psyche—characterized all of their work. To accomplish this kind of analysis, all three relied on a wide variety of historical, sociological, and journalistic accounts of racial violence or conflict, to which they aimed to *add* the perspective of the psychologists. Further, this perspective gave them insight into the relationship between conflicts of interest and the irrational psychological needs that fueled racial “scapegoating”—between the “direct” and “indirect” forms of aggression that Dollard laid out. As such, they understood that white people “scapegoated” racial minority groups both because it served their interests, as well as because it made them feel relief, feel pleasure, feel powerful, and feel in control. And, crucially, this perspective allowed them to see that, from the vantage point

of the individual ‘racist white psyche,’ “scapegoating” was *normal*: it was born of normal psychological mechanisms and followed rules set down by society.

In contrast, Allport’s thinking in *ABC’s of Scapegoating* turned in a different direction. Although he paid heed to social context and culture—the “fertile soil” of “our mixed population,” the temporary “strains and irritations of wartime,” and the “confusion of thought that occurs in times like these”—Allport wrote these conditions as abstract social forces, free from any kind of political or economic conflicts. In other words, rejecting the Popular Front social vision that animated many of the intellectuals whose work laid the foundation of anti-racist thinking in the 1930s and early 1940s, Allport evacuated any discussion of power from his analysis of the causes of white racial prejudice. Further, he focused his attention largely on the individual cognitive and emotional dimensions of racial “scapegoating.”<sup>110</sup> Rather than an interpretation of the complex psychological reactions to social conditions, political structures, and contingent events, Allport offered an explanation of racial “scapegoating” behavior rooted almost exclusively in the mechanics of the individual psyche. For Allport, “scapegoating” represented “the full-fledged persecution of those against whom we are prejudiced and against whom we discriminate.”<sup>111</sup> Implicit here is the sense that systematic racial exclusion, and even “full-fledged persecution,” were essentially more intense, more pronounced expressions of white racial hostility. This shift fundamentally elided the differences between conflict of interest and irrational hostility. Indeed, it collapsed the former into the latter, recasting all of “race prejudice” as a form of irrational hostility emanating from the white psyche for individual psychological reasons.

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<sup>110</sup> Allport, *ABC’s*, 7.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. The “continuum” also flowed in the opposite, “friendly” direction, from “toleration” to “respect” and onto “cooperation.”

This turn in Allport's thinking was not unprecedented. After all, Dollard, Montagu, and Cantril all noted that the propensity to scapegoat differed between individuals according to a host of factors specific to each person. All three indicated that a person's ability to resist their impulse to "scapegoat" stemmed from their level of "maturity"—as did an entire society's capacity to resist the seductions of a "scapegoating" demagogue. Yet, none of them carried this notion very far, preferring to ground their analyses in questions of social conditions or cultural patterns. For Allport, though, the question of the individual personality determinants of "scapegoating" became the pivotal question in the debate over racial prejudice.

Allport's notion of racial "scapegoating" foreshadowed an unmistakable trend, one that marked the social and behavioral sciences more generally. In short, over the course of the 1940s, emphasis shifted from the latter components of the scapegoating theory—the origins and operations of the patterns of prejudice and the social and economic context of racial scapegoating—towards a narrower focus on the individual psyche. In other words, anti-racist social and behavioral scientists shifted their efforts from understanding scapegoating as a social and historical phenomenon to analyzing that subset of the American population who were, as Allport noted, "addicted to scapegoating."<sup>112</sup> But, more importantly, he thought that some people (no one knew how many), for some reasons (no one quite knew why), had "scapegoating" stitched into their personalities, and thus began to need to scapegoat all the time. For Allport, and for the broad collection of intellectuals interested in the question of prejudice, efforts to identify, 'diagnose,' and 'cure' the "bigot in our midst"—or, as he or she came to be called, the "prejudiced-," "bigoted-," or most famously, "authoritarian personality"—became the

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<sup>112</sup> Gordon Allport, "The Bigot in Our Midst," *Commonweal* (1944).

overriding intellectual concern in the post-War years, ultimately drowning out interest in the broader concerns. It is to these intellectuals that chapter four will turn.

As such, the iterations of the “scapegoating” concept visible in the work of Dollard, Montagu, and Cantril stand as artifacts of a moment before this conceptual narrowing, a moment in which “scapegoating” was more metaphor for a variety of cultural, social, and psychological phenomena than an acute psychological diagnosis. In the process of becoming a theory of personality, the scapegoating concept lost quite a bit of its bite as a vehicle for social criticism and became, instead, a tool through which ‘the racist white psyche’ became permanently pathologized.

## Chapter 4:

### “The Bigot in Our Midst:”

#### Gordon W. Allport’s Search for the “Prejudiced Personality,” 1943-1958

Gordon Allport published the first edition of *The Nature of Prejudice* in 1954, a portentous year for the American race problem. He wrote the book in hopes of imposing some theoretical and conceptual clarity on a sprawling field of study that hardly existed a decade earlier, but had emerged by then as the dominant topic of scholarly inquiry in American intellectual life. And, he wrote the book as a defense against a long-standing charge aimed at undermining the authority of science to speak on social and psychological problems. “Some critics,” he wrote in the opening chapter, “hold the whole problem of prejudice to be nothing more than a value-judgment invented by ‘liberal intellectuals.’ When liberals do not approve of a folkway *they* arbitrarily call it prejudice,” he continued, rather than “consult the ethos” of the culture they are examining.<sup>1</sup> Concisely combining a positivist’s faith with a Jamesian’s pragmatism, Allport’s retort cut to the quick: “Prejudice *is* something, and *does* something.”<sup>2</sup> Drawing together more than five hundred works of scholarly research from across the social, behavioral, and natural sciences, Allport showed what prejudice was and what it did, none of it good. But, beyond revealing ‘the nature of prejudice,’ Allport’s book testified to the power of science to illuminate the social and psychological problems wracking the modern world. He meant it to give a measure of the full weight of scientific expertise leaning against racism.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon W Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979 [1954, 1958]), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon W Allport, “Prejudice: A Problem in Psychological and Social Causation,” *Journal of Social Issues*, supplemental series, no. 4 (November 1950): 4-23. Allport first addressed the charge in this essay. Although substantively the same, his retort in *The Nature of Prejudice* is longer winded.

At the same time, though, Allport's imaginary critics came close to hitting their mark, as Allport's decision to address it at all indicates. Through his work on prejudice, Allport executed an intellectual maneuver that had become quite common among his generation of liberal social scientists: restructuring concepts already invested with moral significance around a putatively value-neutral scientific spine—or, as he liked to call it, “backbone.” Indeed, for the better part of three decades at that point, liberal and leftist intellectuals like Allport had stocked an arsenal full of morally charged, scientifically supported arguments against racism, and their work provided crucial armament in the moral revolution against white supremacy that was still rising across the United States—and the world. By the early 1950s, liberal social and behavioral scientists had largely succeeded in making white racial prejudice the nucleus of America's ‘race problem.’ *The Nature of Prejudice* stood as a testament to their work.

Never monolithic, this discourse of scientific anti-racism underwent substantial changes of form and content in the mid-1940s, changes that *The Nature of Prejudice* ratified. Into the early 1940s, American anti-racist psychologists and other behavioral scientists developed their case against racism by seeking out the ‘racist white psyche’ in the precincts where it lived. John Dollard, for instance, constructed his analysis of white racism through his study of the relationship between community mores, social structure, and individual psychological development. To him, white racism was a product of the demands and benefits of living under a regime of white supremacy. For Ruth Benedict, Paul Radin, Herbert Seligmann, and Jacques Barzun, “race-thinking” or “racism” suffused Western culture, was embodied in the stories that people told themselves about their world, and was mobilized by economic and political elites to fight their anti-

democratic battles. And, as chapter 3 outlined, intellectuals like Ashley Montagu and Hadley Cantril looked to the interaction between the white psyche, historically-formed cultural patterns and social structures, and immediate social contexts for their understanding of the nature of racism. In each of these cases, these scholars and intellectuals ‘discovered’ racism by focusing in on the places where the individual psyche intersected with broader social, cultural, economic and historical forces.

By the mid-1940s, though, this focus began to change. Subtly at first, then more decisively over the course of the decade, the larger economic, social, and cultural contours that gave rise to white race prejudice blurred, while the individual psychological determinants of race prejudice came sharply into focus. This change in focus marked the beginning of a new phase in thinking about the nature of prejudice. Working on and through the burgeoning concept of “personality,” anti-racist behavioral and social scientists began to locate the problem of prejudice *within* the structure of the individual ‘racist white psyche.’ More to the point, they began to lock in on the figure of the pathologically prejudiced person, the white man or woman who clung so tightly to their prejudices that their personality became warped by them. Debate about white race prejudice began to turn increasingly around questions of the exact whereabouts of “the bigot in our midst,” as Allport identified this figure in 1944, or constitution of the “prejudiced personality,” as he would call it in *The Nature of Prejudice*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, chapter 27. The historical significance of this shift in anti-racist discourse is usually negative. This image of the pathological bigot became the focal point of anti-racist thought, creating a strong moral and intellectual bulwark against racism. But, as early as 1965, for instance, Carey McWilliams—then editor of *The Nation*, a periodical that could credibly claim to have been right on race for more than a century at that point—began to point out that narrowing attention to white racial prejudice left anti-racist intellectual blind to the broader structural impediments to racial justice. More recently, merging the long-standing critique of the ‘therapeutic ethos’ in mid-century American thought and culture to the dubious notion that the Civil Rights movement collapsed in the wake of its turn toward radicalism in the late 1960s, historian Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn points to the construction of a psychological

When Allport began to think of prejudice as a function of personality in the mid-1940s, the concept of personality was itself highly variegated. One keystone effort to outline the category in the behavioral and social sciences from later in the decade, *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*—edited by two of Allport’s fellow co-founders of Harvard’s famous department of Social Relations, anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and psychologist Henry A. Murray—featured a list of contributors that ran to nearly forty, and included ‘culture and personality’ anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and social psychologists, and (mostly neo-Freudian) psychiatrists and lay-psychoanalysts. This discourse of personality was structured around a central tension between understanding the individual self as a product of culture or social structure, on the one side, and seeing it as the result of a process of development driven by instincts housed in the psyche on the other. Or, as historian Joanne Meyerowitz has recently written, quoting the poet W.H. Auden, the personality discourse addressed itself to the question of “How common culture shapes the separate lives.”<sup>4</sup>

Gordon Allport was the preeminent American personality psychologist of his era, and was thus intimately engaged with this debate over the meaning of personality. As his

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image of the racist white psyche as the moment when liberal anti-racism lost its moral authority. This charge fits retrospectively better than it did at the time. There were no psychologists who pushed for “therapeutic” changes in absence of calls for broad economic and legal transformations. If anything, they were naïve about politics, but not about racism.

<sup>4</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, “‘How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth Century Social Constructionist Thought,” *The Journal of American History* 96, 4 (March 2010): 1057-1084. At the same time, the discourse of personality lived a life outside the precincts of science. As historian Warren Susman has presented it, “personality” emerged in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a popular new conception of selfhood geared toward life in the modern age. This was an “expressive, adaptable, morally unencumbered” conception of the self, one that reflected both “the stress that modernity placed on flexibility, self-presentation, and social effectiveness,” as well as the desire to protect a repository of uniqueness, expressiveness, freedom, and even spirituality in the age of the machine and the bureaucracy. See Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003 [1984]) chapter 14, “‘Personality,’ and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture.” Quotes from Ian A. M Nicholson, *Inventing Personality: Gordon Allport and the Science of Selfhood*, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 7-9.



biographer, Ian Nicholson writes, Allport ‘invented’ personality as a category within American academic psychology.<sup>5</sup> Much as he directed his efforts in *The Nature of Prejudice* nearly twenty years later, Allport wrote his path-breaking 1936 textbook, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, with an eye toward codifying a distinct field of research, setting its boundaries and clarifying its fundamental concepts.<sup>6</sup> His work made individual personalities visible, refined tools for measuring the personality, and standardized a language with which to describe it. Never much of a contrarian, Allport nonetheless set his thinking in contradistinction to those theorists who cast personality as a product of either exterior forces or unconscious impulses. While he did not explicitly deny that culture or social structure shaped the individual personality or ignore the unconscious, Allport maintained that the personality was its own entity and a conscious agent of its own design.

Beginning in the early 1940s, Allport brought this complex and contradictory set of intellectual currents to bear on the problem of prejudice. Using the same intellectual tools with which he built a “science of selfhood” in the 1930s, Allport set to work on understanding *prejudice* as a function of the individual *personality*. Reflecting the psychological consensus that emerged in the early 1940s, and that chapter 3 outlined, Allport saw that, at the most fundamental level, prejudice derived from normal cognitive functions of perception, attitude acquisition, the learning of 'stereotypes,' and the absorption of culture, and that it served normal emotional needs that arose out of everyday life. But, Allport pressed the implications of this consensus one step further, recasting prejudice in the mold of personality. “Prejudice,” he thought, was “basically a

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon W Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1937).

*trait of personality*. When it takes root in a life it grows like a unit. ...the whole inner life is affected; the hostility and fear are systematic.”<sup>7</sup> Allport refined his analysis further still, measuring, charting, and correlating prejudice with other traits, synthesizing it into a broader syndrome. He converted his analyses of prejudice as a personality trait into a coherent “prejudiced personality” type, a figure for whom prejudice came to take on an oversized, permanent, and emotionally necessary role.

In doing so, Allport enacted a crucial turn in the way Americans would come to understand ‘the nature of prejudice.’ Through his work, Allport transformed prejudice from an opinion or attitude that people *held* to a type of person someone *was*. He created an image of the “bigot”—an unsavory, inhumane, anti-democratic character whose need for prejudice made him or her pathological. This was not an incidental invention. The personality profile of the “bigot” grew directly out of the collision of Allport’s brand of personality psychology with his consciousness of prejudice as a social and psychological problem in wartime America. Although not his intent, Allport’s work took the lead in an ideological two-step around racism as a social and psychological problem, the first move of which was to shift attention away from broader forces animating white prejudice. For many social and behavioral scientists, the individual psyche was a site, like myth and community, like rumors and mass movements, to gauge wider social, cultural, and economic influences. Allport did not deny that these were important. Indeed, he thought that they could dominate. But, leaning against the prevailing winds of social thought in the 1930s and early 1940s, he argued that it was the individual’s *personality* that played the decisive part in the expression of prejudice. When that prevailing wind changed

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<sup>7</sup> Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 73.

direction, though, his thinking served to attenuate the connections between the psychology of white racism and its roots in American culture and society.

The second ideological move advanced by Allport's work was more complicated. Even within these narrowed confines, the debate about white prejudice possessed disturbing and potentially radical implications. As one anthropologist put the matter in 1945, if intellectuals assumed that "the existence of race bias is a pathological defect on the American mind... then we in this country are all pathological."<sup>8</sup> Such an admission, coming from within the social scientific establishment and made on the eve of the United States' total victory over fascism and Japanese imperialism, was tantamount to impugning the moral legitimacy of America's triumph, and casting doubt on the nation's claims to authority in the post-War world. This implication was visible in Allport's own research and writing on prejudice. But, he also furnished a ready response. He recast the debate about prejudice and the individual psyche as a struggle between those white people who could control their prejudices, and those who could not. In short, he turned America's race problem into a morality play between identifiable and dangerous pathological bigots, and the population of assumedly normal Americans. This vision of American whiteness carried with it broad repercussions.

Gordon Allport was not the most prominent intellectual to advance this conception of white racism as rooted in individual pathological "personalities." That distinction belonged to the German-Jewish refugee intellectuals Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and the group of psychologists they assembled to write their totemic 1950 tract, *The Authoritarian Personality*. And, in a different way, it also belonged to the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, whose *An American Dilemma* hastened a 'return to

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<sup>8</sup> Scudder Mekeel, "Cultural Aids to Constructive Race Relations," *Mental Hygiene* 27 (April 1945): 177.

the South' and the to the white southerner as the locus of America' race problem.<sup>9</sup> For all their differences—and these were two very different books—they worked together to set the terms of debate on the nature of American racism in the 1950s. Those terms were that racism was a psychological problem, and particularly a problem limited to the population of pathologically racist white people. Although he may not have been the most visible scholar to discuss white racism in these terms, Allport staked out and popularized the idea of a pathologically racist white psyche in the 1940s, establishing some of its key benchmarks and laying the groundwork for how this new discourse on white prejudice would be received both within and beyond the American academy. And, he was an American, which meant he brought to his examination a perspective and a host of anxieties that grew out of American political culture and intellectual life. Examining his work, then, provides crucial insight into the making of “prejudice.”

### ***Gordon Allport and the “Personality” of Psychology***

When Gordon Allport began to explore race prejudice and “personality” in the early 1940s, he was making a conceptual leap that few other American psychologists were prepared to make. Most of his fellow psychologists understood prejudice as a “social attitude.” Their research into prejudice centered on the measurement of white attitudes, the formation of attitudes in children, and the potential for attitude modification. For his

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<sup>9</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1944). Myrdal's book is usually credited with establishing the consensus of post-War racial liberalism. As historian Richard King as recently observed, for all Myrdal's expansive talk about “the mind of the white American” as the locus of the problem, his book revived the intellectual tradition of considering the South as a problem, and for all practical purposes refocused attention on the white southerner. See, Richard H King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004). More broadly on Myrdal and his legacy see Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations the Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

part, Allport had played an instrumental role in codifying the psychology of “social attitudes,” and establishing it as a legitimate field of study in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> But, as his biographer has ably demonstrated, Allport was also the primary architect of the category of personality as proper object of study within American psychology.<sup>11</sup> Aside from his work developing the key concepts of psychology, Allport had also been prepared to make this move by both his moral disposition and political persuasion. He was well versed in the ‘social problems’ discourse of Progressive reform, and was thusly ready to draw race problems into the orbit of scientific social reform.<sup>12</sup> He was also motivated by a broader intellectual project: to examine the possibilities opened and threats posed to selfhood by the modern world and to trace out the consequences of modernization for the American character. Allport’s thinking about race prejudice was tied in with both of these concerns.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Allport contributed the chapter on “Attitudes” in widely influential volume Carl Murchison, ed., *A Handbook of Social Psychology* (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University Press, 1935).

<sup>11</sup> Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*. My rendering of Gordon Allport’s early life history comes largely from Nicholson’s useful biography (he stops in 1939) as well as from an autobiographical sketch Allport composed for the series *The History of Psychology Through Autobiography*. See Ernst G. Boring and Gardner Lindzey, eds., *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* v. 5 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967) 1-28. Also useful is a transcribed interview with Allport conducted by Richard Evans. See Richard Evans, *Gordon Allport: The Man and His Ideas* (New York: Dutton, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the story of the emergence of liberal anti-racism is in part one of the gradual incorporation of “race problems” into the sphere of Progressive reform. Or, more specifically, the transformation of how race fit within the sphere of Progressive social reform, from a problem of social control best solved through the state’s police powers—segregation—to a problem of social justice and democracy that rooted in the exclusion and oppression of racial minorities by white people. This was a halting and uneven transformation, and the tension between the state as agent of Progressive social control and the state as tool of liberal empowerment of oppressed people is never really resolved.

<sup>13</sup> There are three historiographical Gordon Allports, and my portrait of him draws on all three. The first and most complete comes from his biographer, Ian Nicholson, for whom Allport is a ‘reluctant modernist,’ as George Cotkin has put it, developing the tools with which to educational administrators, government bureaucrats, corporate hiring departments peer into the soul while fretting the effects of modernity on the individual psyche. Secondly, Kurt Danziger’s Allport stands as a disciplinary warrior, actively developing a language with which to secure professional authority for psychology. Further along this line is James Capshew, and, in lesser detail, Ellen Herman, who detail Allport’s work as builder of institutions that put psychological knowledge at the service of the state. Lastly, Katherine Pandora writes Allport as a ‘rebel within the ranks,’ a champion of democracy, pluralism, and relativism within an academic psychological establishment enthralled to elitism, protecting the WASPish character of psychology, and an especially rigid positivism. I am drawing on all of these depictions in my sketch. See Nicholson, *Inventing*

Born in Montezuma, Indiana in 1898, and raised in suburban Cleveland, Ohio, in the opening decades of the twentieth century, Gordon Allport lived the modernization of America. Native Clevelanders still called their corner of Ohio the “Western Reserve” at the time, a nod to both their Yankee heritage and their pride at living in the capital of America’s original frontier—their ancestors having founded the city as the marker of Connecticut’s far western holdings, which later became part of the Northwest Territory. But, the city of Allport’s youth bustled with all the energy of a modern metropolis, growing at a remarkable clip, drawing in people from around the country, and devouring the nineteenth century world into which his parents, John and Nellie had been born. The Allport’s rode atop the currents of modernity, rather than being dragged down by them, finding success in the booming city, and adapting their values to the demands of the new age. But, like many middle-class ‘native’ Americans, their transformation was attended by the fear that something essential from the nineteenth century world had been lost.

Tired of the low pay and peripatetic lifestyle of a country doctor, John Allport moved his family to Cleveland for new opportunity. Soon after arriving he opened a small hospital, which he soon expanded. Then, he established a training school for nurses, next, a drug cooperative, and later, a cinema and a restaurant. Nellie helped with the businesses, engaged in a range of philanthropic pursuits, and took responsibility for making sure that the comfortable middle-class life John created did not weaken the resolve for work of their four boys, Harold, Fayette, Floyd, and the youngest, Gordon. By

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*Personality*; Kurt Danziger, *Marking the Mind: A History of Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); James H Capshew, *Psychologists on the March: Science, Practice, and Professional Identity in America, 1929-1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Katherine Pandora, *Rebels Within the Ranks: Psychologists’ Critique of Scientific Authority and Democratic Realities in New Deal America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

all accounts, she succeeded. Lean, un-athletic, even delicate, young Gordon never took to the robust manliness that his father and brothers vigorously embodied, and that served as a common currency among men of their social class in the age of Theodore Roosevelt. He always felt more in tune with the ‘feminine’ values of his mother, including her devotion to service and religiosity. Rather than fight off the fears of loss of that rugged nineteenth century individualism with displays of masculine toughness, then, Gordon had to find different means to square his desires for autonomy, moral rectitude, and order with the demands of the new world a-coming.

Allport brought these concerns with him when he matriculated at Harvard in 1915, following a path his brother Floyd had plotted out a few years earlier. Carrying on the ethic of service he had learned at home, he became a student of “social ethics,” taking a host of courses from Harvard’s department of the same name, which had been founded less than a decade earlier out of the paradigmatically Progressive impulse to use modern social sciences for traditionally Christian social ends. The development of a professionalized social work armed with scientific methods to attack social problems piqued Allport’s interests, appealing to both his budding faith in the sciences as well as his optimism that America’s social ills could be solved. But, Allport also possessed an anti-modern sensibility common among Americans of his generation, a certain unease with the weightlessness of modern culture and discontent with the demands of an increasingly rationalized, bureaucratized, industrialized way of life. This same unease led him to take a teaching position in a missionary school in Constantinople after his graduation, where he hoped to find purpose or meaning or some spiritual depth in the world beyond Cambridge, Massachusetts. And, later in life, this same desire led him to

the Anglo-Catholic Episcopalians, whose elaborate rituals and medieval aesthetic succored many an antimodernist spirit in search of ‘some place of grace,’ as the historian Jackson Lears might have phrased it.<sup>14</sup>

But, for all this, Gordon Allport chose the study of psychology as the field on which he would try to reconcile his quest for meaning and his embrace of modern science. Through his undergraduate career, Allport paired his study of social ethics with classes in psychology. In 1920, he entered a course of graduate study in psychology at Harvard, again following in the footsteps of his brother Floyd, who had completed a doctorate in psychology the year before and who was employed as the University’s first instructor in “social psychology.” The reputation of psychology at Harvard had been on the decline since William James’s death in 1910, reaching its nadir in the early 1920s. Indeed, it remained a joint department to the end of the decade, subservient to philosophy, long after the discipline trended toward independent departmental status. Far from a detriment, though, this state of affairs allowed Allport a degree of independence in his choice of interests—or, at least, a degree of independence from the highly masculine, data-driven club of experimental psychologists that dominated the department. Instead—unsurprisingly—Gordon followed his brother’s recommendation to develop a research project on personality, a topic of growing interest to psychologists, as well as to social workers, psychiatrists, and even legal scholars and sociologists. Floyd certainly had a sense in the early 1920s that the category of personality would become important to the study of psychology. What he could not know—what neither brother could know at the time—was how well Gordon would take to the study of personality.

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, 122-26; on Anglo-Catholicism as anti-modern practice see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).



Allport's decision to take up the study of personality—he completed his dissertation on the “traits of personality” in May, 1922—marked the beginning of a pursuit that would last for the rest of his life and that would take him to the pinnacle of his profession. To understand why personality resonated both with him and with American psychology as a whole, we have to understand the intertwined professional, cultural, and personal imperatives that ran through his work. American psychologists in the 1920s and 1930s were trying to establish the professional legitimacy and scientific authority of their discipline, in part by proving the practical relevance of their work to the world. Well into the twentieth century, psychology consisted largely of speculation about the nature of experience, on the one hand, or tightly controlled experimental analyses of psychological minutiae like ‘reflexes’ and ‘perception,’ on the other—neither of which could claim much ‘cash-value,’ as the aforementioned James would say. The development of tests for measuring intelligence by another Harvard professor, Robert Yerkes, and their deployment by the United States army as a tool for personnel management during the First World War changed that. But, for all the success of ‘intelligence’ in raising the public profile of psychology and proving its potential utility as a discipline, the limits of that concept were immediately apparent to psychologists themselves. More importantly, those limits were equally visible to the educational administrators, government bureaucrats, and managers of the industrial economy who needed ways to gauge people. “Intelligence” just did not work as a tool, but it did create an appetite for new ways of measuring, sorting, and predicting the behavior of people in new institutional settings. This was the appetite that Gordon Allport aimed to satiate when he took up the study of personality in the early-1920s.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, 86-89; Danziger, *Naming the Mind*, chapter 7.

Beyond these intra-disciplinary developments, American psychologists faced competition in their efforts to carve out a sphere of influence for themselves. As the historian of psychology Kurt Danziger has outlined, much of the concept-building within the American psychological establishment—of which both Floyd and Gordon Allport quickly became prominent members—entailed acts of intellectual appropriation from cognate fields in the human sciences. This was particularly the case with “personality.” Through the 1920s, the claims of psychoanalysis and other forms of ‘depth psychology’ to authority over subjectivity grew dramatically in the U.S., outstripping behaviorism as the psychological guidebook to the modern self. Gordon Allport’s ‘invention’ of personality, was the central thrust of a wider effort to secure some measure of expertise over a growing topic of interest—the self and personal life. This strategy is also visible in his second act as a professor of personality psychology (after completing his dissertation, that is). In 1924, he created a new course at Harvard on “approaches to personality,” the first of its kind taught in the U.S. In it, he positioned his own thinking about personality alongside other (assumedly co-equal) “theories” like behaviorism and Freudianism. This was conceptual parity as a weapon of intellectual combat. Or, perhaps, a high-minded version of ‘If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.’<sup>16</sup>

Of course, more was at stake in this competition than merely access to a limited store of cultural legitimacy. The idea of the self presented in behaviorism and in depth psychology also represented real moral and cultural threats to the kind of world that Gordon Allport grew up in, parts of which he wished to preserve. Allport himself revealed the nature of this threat in the origin story he later told about his decision to

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<sup>16</sup> Danziger, *Naming the Mind*, especially chapters 7, 8, and 9 on “Motivation and Personality,” “Attitudes,” and “Metalanguage: The Technological Framework,” respectively.

study personality.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 1920, while on his way back to the States from his mission in Turkey, Allport made a stop at Berggasse 19, Vienna IX—the renowned home of the renowned Sigmund Freud. Despite having requested the meeting with the famous psychologist, the 22-year-old Allport had neglected to think through what he wanted to talk about. After some awkwardness, Allport began to recount the behavior of a child he observed while he was on the train to Austria who was clearly in the early stages of developing a severe dirt phobia. Upon finishing the story, Allport was met with a rude—but entirely predictable—shock. Freud suggested that the boy in the story was Allport himself. Allport was a man who prided himself on his primness and comportment, all of which marked him as a member of the American professional middle-class. One need not have been the founder of psychoanalysis to figure that Gordon Allport had something of a dirt phobia. Later, though, when Allport reflected on that moment, he came to a stark realization. In search of the hidden, underlying well-spring of motive forces, Freud—and depth psychology more general—could not see that Allport was really just a student and “a brash tourist” trying to strike up a conversation with a famous psychologist. From that point, Allport resolved to construct a theory of personality that gave the ego, the conscious self, the active agent its due.

This story can be read in a number of ways, as it has been, including by Allport himself. At least in part, though, it speaks to the cultural work that he imagined his theory of personality had to do.<sup>18</sup> Broadly speaking, Allport’s aim was to secure the relevance of

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<sup>17</sup> Gordon Allport, “My Encounter with Personality Theory,” an unpublished manuscript recorded and edited by W.G.T Douglas, Boston University School of Theology, October 29, 1962. Gordon W. Allport Papers, Harvard University Archives series 4118, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>18</sup> This story, and analysis thereof, appears in a number of places. For a run-down of them, see Alan C Elms, *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 5.

the conscious dimensions of the self—the kind of nineteenth century moral rectitude and self-possession on which he had been reared—in an age of bureaucratic rationalization, urban massification, and industrial production. (While, at the same time, providing the necessary intellectual technology to facilitate that process, an irony felt by Allport as anxiety.) By removing ‘man’ from the driver’s seat of his own psyche, the high priests of the unconscious joined Allport’s list of enemies of the autonomous self.<sup>19</sup> At a more fundamental level, though, Freud represented a threat to Allport’s epistemology as well. Whatever the personality was, Allport worked from the assumptions that psychologists could glean useful knowledge about it from *asking*. Freudianism, by its nature, cast that faith into doubt.<sup>20</sup> Nor was Freud his only foil. Allport’s idea of the personality stood in contrast to crude Watsonian behaviorists, who insisted on reducing all individuals to a collection of stimuli and response, and, by the mid-1930s, to the culturalists coming from anthropology, who reduced the individual self to an expression of the ‘whole way of life’ or ‘patterns of culture’ of the group.<sup>21</sup> For Allport, protecting individuality from the homogenizing forces of modernity meant seeing the personality as an entity worth studying on its own terms.

To these ends, Allport developed a concept of “personality” that was at once easily charted and at the same time more than the sum of its ‘graphological’ quirks and trait correlations. Allport’s “personality,” was decidedly empirical. It could be measured, tested, triangulated by a variety of psychometric apparatus, thus giving it real scientific

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<sup>19</sup> This is Nicholson’s key interpretive point. See Ian A. M. Nicholson, “Gordon Allport, Character, and the ‘Culture of Personality,’ 1897-1937,” *History of Psychology* 1 (1998): 52-68, and *Inventing Personality*.

<sup>20</sup> On the epistemological challenge of psychoanalysis to psychology, see Danziger, chapter 7. Although Allport held much of Freud’s thinking in disdain, he left his visit with Freud holding the man in high esteem. He never allowed his low estimate of Freudianism to prevent him from establishing congenial intellectual relationships with the exiled, Frankfurt School intellectuals in the 1940s, as we will see below.

<sup>21</sup> On Allport’s resistance to “cultural” or “situational” approaches to personality see Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, 195-8, and Pandora, *Rebels within the Ranks*, 106-110.

purchase. Not above using handwriting analyses (graphology), he preferred the pencil-and-paper questionnaire, of the kind he developed to measure relative “ascendancy-submission”—essentially how aggressive or passive a personality one was—as well as “introversion-extroversion” (a designation he took from Jung). The entities that these tests measured were “traits,” the “systems of habits” that made up the “essential units” of the personality, Allport argued. In addition to its particular pattern of such “traits,” Allport’s “personality” was defined by its unique assemblage of “attitudes”—its feelings of favorability or unfavorability towards objects, people, or social issues—which could also be tested, measured, and correlated with each other to reveal commonalities. Further, Allport thought that these traits were themselves organized according to the system of higher “values” each person held, which could be ascertained by asking people whether they were economic, political, religious, theoretical, aesthetic, or social in their basic orientation. As for “motivation,” Allport did not deny that instincts played a role, but he believed that a person’s motives became distinct—“functionally autonomous,” he called it—from their instinctive roots as they developed psychologically. People obviously displayed common “traits,” held common “values,” and shared common “attitudes.” And, these commonalities could be derived through statistical correlations of personality test data, which made the personality knowable. But, crucially for Allport, the existence of such correlations did not efface the essential nature of personality, that each person assembled a pattern of traits and held to a set of convictions that was unique to them.<sup>22</sup>

Allport substantiated this possibility through his effort to sketch out a normative ideal for the “personality,” what he identified as the “mature personality.” To Nicholson,

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<sup>22</sup> Allport, *Personality*. As Nicholson argues, Allport used his theorizing about personality as a means of reconciling the fluid and adaptable ‘modern temper’ implied in concept of “personality” with the kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal of “character.”

Allport's ideal of personality represented the psychologists' effort to re-inscribe the ideals of the nineteenth century man of 'character' into a modern, scientific norm.<sup>23</sup> Certainly, aspects of Allport's "mature personality" resonate with that impulse. But, his ideal also embodies a number of distinctly modernist themes. The first "requirement" of a "mature personality" was the "extension of the self" through commitment to higher "ego-ideal" that stood above the superego as a kind of personal north star, giving each individual "*directionality*."<sup>24</sup> Although clearly a redux of an older morally-oriented ideal of life, Allport's concept here was explicitly relativistic—a kind of 'loyalty to loyalty' as the Harvard Pragmatist Josiah Royce outlined it—with commitment itself trumping the specific goals chosen. He tempered his idea of self-extension with the notion of "*self-objectification*"—a psychological equivalent to Ruth Benedict's notion of 'culture consciousness,' or Randolph Bourne's 'life of irony.' The "mature" self, he thought, developed "insight" into its own psychological needs and processes, and a marked "sense of humor" about them.<sup>25</sup> Lastly, the "mature personality" also possessed a unifying "philosophy of life," a broad frame of reference through which to understand the ups and downs of daily life, but not one that excludes others.<sup>26</sup>

Allport betrayed his class anxieties with his sense of the barriers to developing a "mature personality." While recognizing the obvious class bias of his ideal, and counseling "the psychologist" not to assume that members of the "professional circles" to which he belonged represented the larger society, he nonetheless assumed that it was members of his own class that were amply represented among the "mature" types—

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<sup>23</sup> Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, 202-3.

<sup>24</sup> Allport, *Personality*, 219.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 220-224.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

though, even here, he thought they were relatively few in number.<sup>27</sup> More broadly, Allport's list of the "restrictions on the development of personality" revealed a characteristic Progressive era anxiety about the psychological dangers of modern life. Besides "low intelligence," he noted "uncontrolled emotion, infantilism, regression, dissociation, stereotypes, autism [a "compensation that occurs when an individual disregards completely the demands of his physical and social environment, withdrawing into himself to day-dream of success"], suggestibility, and many other entirely human, but none the less abortifacient conditions."<sup>28</sup> Born of any and all of these "restrictions," the development of race prejudices would slot easily into this litany of problems preventing the individual from cultivating a "mature personality" of his or her own.

Thinking back from the perspective of twenty five years, Gordon Allport remembered his decision to write the first textbook on the study of the individual psyche, *Personality: An Interpretation*, in 1936, as the culmination of nearly two decades of thinking, research, and teaching on the on the topic. Allport claimed not to care "what happened" after its publication—a claim his biographer casts into doubt—because he had "written it for no audience" and did so only because he had to write it.<sup>29</sup> Whatever Allport had in mind in the mid-1930s when he sat down to compile his treatise on personality, it was, for the discipline of psychology, foundational moment. Allport's was far and away the most successful and influential of three such efforts to codify "personality" published in the mid-1930s, and thus established the basic standards and conventions for studying

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<sup>27</sup> Allport, *Personality*, 214-15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>29</sup> Allport, "My Encounters With Personality Theory," 5.

“personality” within the discipline.<sup>30</sup> For the generation of students who came to rely upon Allport’s book, it represented the crystallization of a new way of thinking about the modern self.

But, Allport’s claim to have written the book for himself possessed at least a grain of truth, one that is visible in the proper role of the personality psychologist that the book carves out. In part, it is an extended argument for the notion that any real grasp of the individual personality had to be gotten through a creative synthesis of test data, “expressive movements,” “projection techniques,” writings, and other forms of behavior into a unified whole. Allport called this method by the terribly unscientific term “intuitionism,” a name that betrayed its origins in Allport’s encounter with the German tradition of personality psychology that dealt in ‘*lebensform*’ and ‘Gestalts’—‘life-forms’ or ‘ideal types,’ and ‘wholes.’ But, it was also a brief on behalf of deeper set of convictions, namely that people had an essence beyond that tests themselves could not capture, and that the creativity of the personality psychologist himself could intuit that essence of people.<sup>31</sup>

What *Personality* did not contain, however, was any discussion of how or why “race prejudice,” or even prejudice more generally, becomes a part of the personality, or instrumental to an individual’s emotional life. In more than five hundred pages, Allport mentioned prejudice only once, and that in a list of further studies of “common traits,” in which he cited the work of a *sociologist*, Emory Bogardus. Nor was Allport alone among personality psychologists to neglect racial prejudice. None of the other “personality”

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<sup>30</sup> On the immediate reception and long-term impact of Allport’s text see Nicholson, particularly chapter 9 and Danziger, chapter 7.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholson discusses the infusion of German theories of personality into Allport’s thinking in chapter 6, particularly pages 118-121; On Allport’s “intuitionism,” see Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, 157-162.



textbooks dedicated much space to topic either.<sup>32</sup> On its face, this omission is a little surprising. “Attitudes” were a key component to “personality,” and by the 1930s the study of “racial attitudes” had developed into discernible sub-field of social psychology. Moreover, Gordon Allport played a crucial supporting role to his brother Floyd in the 1920s reorienting American social psychology around the study of “social attitudes,” including “attitudes” toward racial minority groups. Gordon Allport’s chapter on “Attitudes” in the foundational *Handbook of Social Psychology* (1935) set the parameters of the study of attitudes for decades.<sup>33</sup> The particular interest in “racial attitudes” among social psychologists reflected the broader public concerns about race and racial conflict in the 1920s, which is to say that American social psychologists were driven to study “race attitudes” by both interdisciplinary competition and public interest. But, well into the 1930s, for a personality psychologist like Allport, there was not similar goad to studying the role of “race prejudice” in the individual psyche.

This began to change in the late 1930s, for two reasons. First, the publication of two substantial treatments of prejudice and the white psyche: John Dollard’s *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* in 1937, and *Frustration and Aggression* in 1939. Gordon Allport did not fully engage with the role of prejudice in the individual psyche until a few years later, at first through his analysis of rumors, and then through his discussion of “scapegoating.”

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<sup>32</sup> Henry A. Murray, *Explorations in Personality; a Clinical and Experimental Study of Fifty Men of College Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938); Ross Stagner, *Psychology of Personality* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937). Murray’s book made one reference, Stagner’s five.

<sup>33</sup> Allport, “Attitudes,” Murchison, ed., *A Handbook of Social Psychology* (1935). The origins of this research trace to University of Chicago-trained sociologist Emory Bogardus, who developed the concept of “social distance” as a proxy for white racial prejudice, and created a pencil-and-paper questionnaire with which to measure white racial attitudes. Through the 1930s, American psychologists continued to use Bogardus’s “social distance” scale as a touchstone for creating alternative methods for measuring white hostility to racial others. For a useful discussion of these efforts see John P Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case Against Segregation*, Critical America (New York: New York University Press, 2001), chapters 2 and 3, and Richards, *Race, Racism, and Psychology*.

And, there is little direct evidence that he was motivated to do so out of a sense of competition with his Freudian interlocutors who were horning in on a topic of growing concern to the nation. But, that said, when Allport finally did write about prejudice and the personality, his work betrayed a certain interdisciplinary jealousy. The bibliography of *ABC's of Scapegoating* was extensive, numbering more than forty items.<sup>34</sup> The list included Ruth Benedict's *Race: Science and Politics* (1940), Franz Boas's *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1928), the landmark of *The Negro in Chicago* (1922) conducted under the auspices of the University of Chicago's famed Department of Sociology, and director of the Yale's Institute for Human Relations Mark May's *The Social Psychology of War and Peace* (1942), among others works by historians, psychologists, and social psychologists. But, as one reviewer at the time noted, one prominent contributor to the subject was quite conspicuous by his absence from Allport's list—John Dollard.<sup>35</sup>

Second, of course, the fascists conquered Europe.

### ***Gordon Allport's Discovery of Prejudice***

Gordon Allport arrived at Harvard in 1915 with an abiding interest in social problems, one that he translated as a young instructor in the early 1920s into courses on social ethics and public policy, which he taught along side his signature class on personality.<sup>36</sup> He maintained that interest during his brief stint teaching at Dartmouth, and he brought it with him when he was installed as a professor of social psychology back at his *alma mater* in 1930. And, even as questions of high theoretical and methodological importance drew much of his attention, Allport's interest in 'the public and its problems,' as one of

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<sup>34</sup> Gordon Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating* (Chicago: Central YMCA College, n.d.) 71-2.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Bird, "Review of *ABC's of Scapegoating*," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 28 (August, 1944): 356.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon Allport, "My Encounters With Personality Theory," 4.

his intellectual inspirations, John Dewey, put it, drew him into the intellectual and political ferment of the 1930s. At the intellectual level, the climate of the New Deal era led Allport to fuse his long-standing goals of creating a scientifically-guided social reform and safe-guarding individuality with the two dominant tropes of prevailing liberal social thought, namely ‘democracy’ and ‘cooperation.’ Any solutions to the problem plaguing the nation—and the world—in the 1930s were going to come from both empowering ‘the people’ to take on the forces that created the crisis, as well as supplanting the ‘competitive’ ethos at the heart of capitalism with an new ethic of ‘cooperation.’<sup>37</sup> Allport cheered the possibilities.

Allport found no shortage of practical outlets through which to manifest his political sensibility. In politics, he supported the socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas, whose Social Gospel roots matched Allport’s, and whose notion of a democratically achieved socialism Allport preferred to FDR more limited reform agenda. Closer to home, he became an active member of the American Federation of Teachers, and a champion of faculty unionization at Harvard.<sup>38</sup> When it came to his activities within the discipline of psychology, Allport’s liberalism made him a prominent ‘rebel within the ranks,’ as the historian Katherine Pandora put it. Indeed, according to Pandora, Allport fashioned himself as something of a psychological ‘Martin Luther’ to a discipline enthralled to a religion of positivism and dedicated to protecting the prevailing social order. As such, when a group of younger, leftist psychologists—convinced that the

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<sup>37</sup> On democracy and cooperation, two themes the run through much of the work of the liberal anti-racists, see Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). On John Dewey’s significance to American intellectual life in the 1920s and 1930s (and beyond), and particularly his role in establishing ‘democracy’ and ‘cooperation’ as dominant themes during the era, see Pells, Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Cornell University Press, 1993), and James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Nicholson, *Inventing Personality*, chapter 8; Pandora, *Rebels*, 12.

conservatism and institutional sclerosis of the American Psychological Association (APA) prevented professional psychology from addressing the important problems confronting the country during the Great Depression—founded activist-oriented Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) in 1936, Allport was among them. Further, his election to the presidency of the APA the next year represented, in part, the legitimation of that insurgency.

Allport's thinking about the nature of race prejudice came out of this milieu, and in particular out of his confrontation with the intertwined problems of capitalism, fascism, and democracy. Allport was a dedicated critic of capitalism. He worked against the dehumanizing effects of the modern industrial order on working people, he argued against private or corporate control of vital social resources like radio, and he railed against the resistance to social change among the upper classes. By nearly any measure he was a democratic socialist. But, following a broader trend among American liberals, Allport came to believe that the essential conflict of the modern world was not between socialism and capitalism, but rather between democracy and fascism. As such, he aided in organizing relief efforts for Spanish Republicans fighting against the fascists, and after the fascist victory in March of 1939, he co-sponsored an American lecture tour of the Chief Psychiatrist of the Spanish Republican Army to raise funds for refugees.<sup>39</sup> More broadly, Allport believed that the present form of capitalism created the social conditions, and in turn, psychological vulnerabilities that made fascism possible, but that capitalism itself could be tamed by democratic means. Fascism, by contrast, meant the destruction of

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<sup>39</sup> Lorenz Finison, "Psychologists and Spain," *American Psychologist* 32 (December 1977): 1080-1084.

the individual, the abolition of reason, and the perversion of science. Fascism was the irredeemable enemy of democracy.<sup>40</sup>

Allport vigilantly pursued opportunities to prove the social utility of psychology and social psychology in these overlapping political conflicts. With the outbreak of the War in Europe, and then the bombing of Pearl Harbor, those opportunities began showing up at his office door in Emerson Hall.<sup>41</sup> As with much of the psychological establishment, Allport's 'war work' focused on civilian "morale," the umbrella concept used to describe and analyze the American people's will to fight the war on its domestic front. Through the seminar on "Psychological Problems of Morale" at Harvard (the model for some twenty or so such "Defense Seminars" started at Universities around the country), Allport joined with colleagues and graduate students to tackle questions about the effects on morale of propaganda, rationing, and social conflict, among other problems. Given the needs of total mobilization and the social transformations the War touched off, as well as the nature of the enemy, it did not take long before the question of "race prejudice" moved to the center of their agenda—and stayed there. Indeed, the problem of prejudice became such an overriding consideration for the seminar that, after the War, Allport morphed it into a seminar expressly dedicated to prejudice and group conflict—one that he would teach regularly until his retirement in 1967, and that set the standard for how prejudice would be taught in colleges across the U.S.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Pandora, *Rebels Within the Ranks*, 112-3; more generally on the intersections and divergences of 'left' and 'liberal' in American politics and social thought in the 1930s, see Douglas Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Allport, "Gordon W. Allport," in Boring and Lindsey, eds., *A History of Psychology*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> On the development of the morale concept, see Herman, *Romance of American Psychology*, chapter 1. On the multiple committees and institutions that American psychologists, including Allport, developed around the problems of morale, see Capshew, *Psychologists on the March*, chapter 2. For a personal take on the significance of the seminar to the development of the concept of "prejudice" see comments by

Initially, at least, the problems stemming from race prejudice presented themselves in a different guise than Allport might have expected. In the fall of 1940, Allport began to collect reports of common rumors circulating around Boston, and prominent among these were vicious rumors about blacks and Jews. Whatever damage these might be doing to general morale, they were surely devastating, he thought, to the morale of Boston's African American and Jewish communities, whose vigorous support of the War effort was vital to success. Allport approached the study of rumors as the examination of a pressing social problem, and as an audition for a new brand of applied social psychology. Indeed, Allport and his fellow rumor-ologists began their work in 1940, but did not publish their definitive statement, *The Psychology of Rumor*, until 1947, largely because the demands of the work took precedence over the publication of research findings.<sup>43</sup>

Those demands stemmed from the very nature of the subject. "Within the social organism," Allport diagnosed, "the bacilli of rumor are always active."<sup>44</sup> Growing "virulent" at times of "social strain," rumors "sap morale and menace national safety by spreading needless alarm and by raising extravagant hopes." But, "most damaging of all, [they] spread the virus of hostility and hate against loyal subgroups within the nation."<sup>45</sup> Allport's confusion on the prognostic differences between viral and bacterial infections did not prevent him from developing a course of treatment. He responded to these threats by establishing a "rumor clinic" in conjunction with the Boston *Herald-Traveler* in

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Thomas I. Pettigrew in Richard I. Evans, *Gordon Allport: The Man and His Ideas* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 117-139.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon W Allport and Leo Joseph Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: H. Holt and company, 1947). Allport tells the story of how he came to study rumors in the book's preface.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

1942.<sup>46</sup> “Clinicians,” namely psychologists and journalists, solicited accounts of current rumors from readers across the city. In the interest of dispelling the falsehood underlying a given rumor, they then published both a factual correction as well as an analysis of the reason why such rumors were spreading. When *Reader’s Digest* profiled Allport’s efforts in September of the same year, requests began to come in from across the country for help launching similar “clinics.”<sup>47</sup>

Allport garnered two key insights through his study of rumors, both of which led him to consider the emotional significance of prejudice to the individual personality. First, recognizing that rumors proved highly resistant to either inoculation or cure-by-truth, Allport realized that rumors represented more than just “gossip” or “idle” misinformation. Rumors “were profoundly purposive, serving important emotional ends” that were often obscure to both the teller and listener. “They know only that the tale seems important to them. In some mysterious way it seems to alleviate their intellectual uncertainty and personal anxiety.”<sup>48</sup> But, for Allport, there was little mystery: “By permitting one to slap at the thing one hates, [rumor] *relieves* a primary emotional urge.” Continuing, he noted that, “at the same time—in the same breath—it serves to *justify* one in feeling as he does about the situation, and to *explain* to himself and to others why he feels that way.”<sup>49</sup> “Rumors,” in short, were a form of “scapegoating.” Because rumors filled a significant emotional function, the content of the rumor could shift (within certain boundaries) and remain undiminished so long as it fulfilled the underlying emotional

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<sup>46</sup> Allport and Postman, *Psychology of Rumor*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> On the rumor clinics, see Allport and Postman for a first hand account of their work; see Cathy Faye, “Governing the Grapevine: The Study of Rumor During World War II,” *History of Psychology* 10, 1 (Feb, 2007): 1-21.

<sup>48</sup> Allport and Postman, *Psychology of Rumor*, vii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. Italics in original.

need. By implication, this meant that the spread of rumors was dangerous to democracy, and quite difficult to check with information alone—both disheartening to a democratic reformer like Allport. But, this also meant that rumors offered an access point into the emotional inner workings of the psyche.

Second, Allport was surprised that so many of the rumors spreading across the city concerned African Americans and Jews, especially considering the relatively small size and limited influence of both groups. Writing up his research after the War, Allport identified several types of rumors, including “curiosity rumors,” “fear rumors,” and “wish rumors.” But, he found that the “largest class of wartime rumors [were those] reflecting *hate and hostility*—‘wedge drivers.’”<sup>50</sup> And, an outsized portion of these “wedge drivers” were, as the sociologist Howard Odum called them in his contemporaneous compendium of southern rumor-mongering, “rumors of race.”<sup>51</sup> When one of Allport’s graduate students and collaborators on the “rumor clinic,” R.H. Knapp, quantified the kinds of rumors circulated in the summer of 1942, he found that “wedge” rumors comprised more than 65 percent of all rumors (“fear” and “pipe-dream” rumors making up 25 and 2 percent, respectively), with anti-Semitic and anti-Negro rumors alone comprising nearly 15 percent.<sup>52</sup> Had he or she been listening, the average Bostonian would have learned that “The President is Jewish,” “The Jews are evading the draft,” and “The Negroes are forming Eleanor Clubs, in which they assemble guns and ice picks for a charge upon the Capitol.”<sup>53</sup> Unlike other “wedge” rumors, namely those about the armed forces and the Roosevelt administration, racial rumors carried particular significance. Whether

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<sup>50</sup> Allport and Postman, *Psychology of Rumor*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Howard W. Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to American Crisis* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1943).

<sup>52</sup> Allport and Postman, *Psychology of Rumor*, 12-13.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11



intentionally planted or not, such racial “wedge rumors” served the “divide and rule” strategy that the Nazis had perfected in their conquest of Europe. Their presence across the U.S., then, was an ominous sign.

The full gravity of the problem of race prejudice in American society was brought home to Gordon Allport in the early 1940s in ways subtle and dramatic. The race riots in Beaumont, Texas, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Harlem in 1943 made many American intellectuals realize just how taught the demands of wartime mobilization had pulled the thread of ‘national unity,’ and just how easily that thread could break. Indeed, signs that the social fabric was fraying were visible across the nation even before the outbreak of open hostilities. For Allport, the spread of race-rumors constituted such a warning sign. And, there were others. Beginning in the early 1940s, opinion pollsters began to survey the attitudes of the American people about a range of important topics, including their attitudes about racial minority groups. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Denver, whose polling work Allport (along with his former student, Hadley Cantril) consulted on, offered a number of scientific tests of prejudice and the white American psyche.<sup>54</sup> What they found was unsettling. By Allport’s reckoning, this data show that “85 per cent of the population is ready to scapegoat some group or another,” 5 to 10 percent being “violently anti-Semitic,” with an additional 45 per cent expressing measurable anti-Semitism, and at least 40 per cent holding “prejudice against the Negro.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890-1960* (Transaction Publishers, 2009), 311-312. On polling during war-time, and the development of opinion surveys more generally see Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Gordon Allport, “Bigot in Our Midst,” *Commonweal* (October 6, 1944) 161-2; 164-5. This article appeared several times in late 1944 and 1945. Allport cited “published and unpublished polling data.” These most likely came from the NORC, a group for which he, his student Hadley Cantril, and his Harvard

Allport was well aware of these gauges of national race-sentiment. But, to him, such indicators of the percentage of people who expressed negative perceptions of Jews or Negroes revealed only part of the problem that prejudice posed to American society. To get a complete sense of the threat of prejudice, one needed to know more than what was captured by phone surveys or street corner polling or returned post cards—all typical methods for collecting opinion data.<sup>56</sup> Surveys could map out the mentality of the American people as a whole, but navigating across the landscape of racial prejudice required a sense of the topography of the American *personality*. Prejudices were more than expressed opinions or even underlying attitudes. A person's prejudices traced back to their childhood experiences and sense of cultural belonging; they filled emotional needs and carried special significance. Polling showed how much of “the American population [led] mental lives in which feelings of group hostility play[ed] an appreciable role.”<sup>57</sup> But, they could not show what role they played or how ‘appreciable’ it was. They could not reveal how much prejudice a person held, or how likely someone was to act out their prejudices. For Allport, understanding this problem, and finding ways to solve it, meant understanding the significance of prejudice to the American personalities.

Allport examined the relationship between prejudice and personality in a series of articles, pamphlets, radio scripts, and speeches he wrote in the mid-1940s. Prominent among these was *ABC's of Scapegoating*, the popular primer on the psychology of prejudice and other expressions of social hostility put out by the Harvard Morale

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colleague Samuel Stoffer all consulted. According to Converse, in the early and mid-1940s, NORC was the only large polling outfit make serious efforts at polling racial attitudes. Elmo Roper and George Gallup began to pick up the issue later in the decade. See Converse, *Survey Research*, 310-312, especially endnotes 34, 38, 41.

<sup>56</sup> See Igo, *Averaged American*, 221. Also, Gordon W. Allport and Bernard M. Kramer, “Some Roots of Prejudice,” *Journal of Psychology* 22 (1946): 1.

<sup>57</sup> Allport, “Bigot in Out Midst,” 165.

committee in 1943, and discussed in chapter three, above. Allport's thinking on "scapegoating" was largely an extension of his thinking on rumors.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, for him rumors were a form "verbal aggression," the most widely practiced form of "scapegoating," and the precursor to more aggressive forms, namely "personal violence," "forcible social discrimination," and even "legal persecutions and stigmata."<sup>59</sup> Allport's explicit purpose in the pamphlet was to anatomize the concept of "scapegoating," and to present it in a pedagogical format that might gain wider currency. In its broad outline, Allport's definition of "scapegoating" would have been quite familiar to John Dollard, Hadley Cantril (again, one of Allport's students), and Ashley Montagu. Stemming from his individualistic and psychological frame of reference, though, Allport's thinking did differ. Dollard, Cantril, and Montagu each paid heed to the significance of individual psychological factors in "scapegoating," but they focused their attention on the nexus between psychology, entrenched cultural and social patterns, and prevailing economic and political conditions. Allport, by contrast, kept close to the individual psyche.

Allport thought that the key factors in generating "scapegoating" behavior were all essentially 'normal.' "Psychologically," he thought, "we must recognize that scapegoating grows out of normal attitudes, normal biases, and ordinary prejudices."<sup>60</sup> He paid careful attention to the variety of "motives" that drove people to "scapegoat," including emotional relief from "thwarting and deprivation," feelings of guilt, fear and

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<sup>58</sup> The contiguity of "rumor" and "scapegoating" as categories of analysis for the Morale Seminar was manifested in their choice of topics. *ABC's of Scapegoating* was their second pamphlet. Their first, published a year earlier, addressed the *ABC's of Wartime Rumors*. Neither pamphlet offered much for creativity in titling, but one seemed to hit a cultural nerve: *Scapegoating* has been reprinted at least 3 times within a decade; *Wartime Rumors* was only printed once, and by Harvard at that.

<sup>59</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 56-57.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

anxiety, the desire for “self-enhancement,” and the satisfactions of social “conformity.”<sup>61</sup> He derived his discussion of how the “individual motivated to scapegoat will select his victims” from ongoing psychological research into “attitudes,” and particularly into how “the child ‘catches’” his or her “predilections and prejudices” from the words and deeds of adult authority figures, from the cues presented by social context, and from living in “a culture impregnated with definitions of status and inferences of worth” tied to race.<sup>62</sup> Allport recognized that racial stereotypes were demonstrably in error, and that errors obscured crucial differences between people, doing violence to their individuality. But, the mental act of reducing people to membership in a “totality” was itself normal. Stereotypes, “whose function is to simplify the business of adjustment in an extremely complex world, by reducing people and events to a few clear-cut traits,” was a natural response of the human mind to the conditions of modern life.<sup>63</sup>

At times of social duress, though, these normal psychological responses surged toward “scapegoating.” Events that exhaust our emotional and intellectual capacities—times of “war, famine, revolution, depression”—bring “out in fearful vividness the helplessness which the individual feels in the face of world-wide forces.”<sup>64</sup> At such times, he thought, critical faculties would fall away, and people could no longer think clearly about their circumstances: “Simplification of issues is sought in order to make possible some understanding of this social chaos.”<sup>65</sup> Despite indicating that this was a reversion to a form of “primitive reasoning,” Allport gave this “muddled or pre-logical” state of mind

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<sup>61</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 15-24. Chapter 3, “Motives in Scapegoating.”

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; 27-44.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

a distinctly modern name.<sup>66</sup> He called it “tabloid thinking” or “tabloidism,” a concept he brought over from his work on rumors.<sup>67</sup> People blamed munitions makers for the war, or blacks for economic frustration because doing so seemed somehow related to the complex problem plaguing them, and provided a clear course of action—attack the group in question. “The error is two-fold: we manufacture a tabloid goblin” by seeing a chosen scapegoat group as an undifferentiated “totality” conforming to received stereotypes. Then “we unconsciously vent our many private irritations upon it,” which we rationalize by way of “some specific misdeed suggested to us by gossip or rumor.”<sup>68</sup> These out-sized stereotypes blinded people, preventing them from directing their ire “against the *true* cause of [their] deprivation, fear, [or] guilt.”<sup>69</sup> And, perhaps most importantly, in such states people would become vulnerable to the entreaties of unscrupulous leaders and demagogues, who gained power by trafficking in the “tabloidism” people found appealing.

To clarify this transformation of common prejudices into open “scapegoating,” Allport offered a graphical representation of social hostility. “Scapegoating,” he wrote, stood “at the unfavorable extreme” of his “Continuum of Social Relationships among Human Groups,” at the “opposite end of the scale from friendly, cooperative behavior between groups.” The “mildest and most normal form of group-exclusion,” what Allport designated “predilection,” consisted of little more than the “simple preference” for one “culture, one skin color, one language” over another. Although “natural and inevitable,”

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<sup>66</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 4; 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 19; Also Gordon W. Allport, “Brotherhood or Chaos,” A speech delivered to Temple Israel, February 18, 1944 (Gordon W. Allport Papers, Harvard University Archives series 4118): 2.

<sup>68</sup> Allport, “Bigot in Out Midst,” 163.

<sup>69</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 21-22. “Economic frustration among marginal workers is no easier to bear simply because the workers are ignorant of its causes.”

if these predilections grow “rigid, inflexible, [or] exaggerated” they become “prejudice,” an “attitude in a closed mind” and “impervious to evidence.” Prejudice “stultifies the mind that possess it,” but otherwise causes no “social harm” until acted upon. But, left “uncontrolled,” prejudices “breed discrimination”—“forcibly and unjustly” barring people from “our vocation, our neighborhood, [or] our country. “Finally, if conditions are ripe—if frustration, ignorance, and propaganda combine in proper proportions—discrimination breaks over into scapegoating.” Differing only by degree of “violence and expressed aggression,” “scapegoating” represented the highest stage of social hostility, the “full-fledged persecution of those against whom we are prejudiced and against whom we discriminate.”<sup>70</sup>

Allport’s schematic of the psychology of race prejudice and racial “scapegoating” had profound social implications, particularly in the United States. In Allport’s rendering, America’s “mixed populations” managed to “live side by side peacefully enough” through a “somewhat uneasy coordination of racial groups.”<sup>71</sup> “Frictions and prejudices” abounded, he thought, and the resulting discrimination against minority groups was an affront to democracy. Further, this ‘uneasy peace’ regularly fell under attack by anti-democratic forces—Allport named “Ku Kluxers,” “Bundists,” “Christian Fronters,” Coughlinites, and “hatelers,” a term he borrowed from the socialist magazine *PM*.<sup>72</sup> And yet, American democracy had showed itself ‘resilient’ enough to weather these conflicts. In part, this resiliency stemmed from Americans’ common identity as immigrants—even “the Negro and the American Indian,” Allport thought, “have been

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<sup>70</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 10-14.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Gordon Allport, “Scapegoating and Its Remedies,” n.d. (Gordon Allport Papers, Harvard University Archives series 4118), 8.

caught up in the same dream of emancipation and freedom.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, America’s “social fabric” derived its durability from the “our frontier,” which allowed people to escape racial frictions and broader social tensions. Allport’s shortcomings as a historian notwithstanding, he saw his pluralist rendition of American exceptionalism—recast as America’s exceptional ability to weather racial conflict without devolving into the kind of race wars routinely broke out across the Continent—as itself under threat. “The safety-valve of the frontier is no longer an appreciable protection against the mounting pressure within.”<sup>74</sup> Now, in “times of abnormal social tension and personal frustration,” “our tendency to fix the blame for our woes upon others,” combined with our “pet prejudices” against racial and religious minorities, led to mass outbursts of “irrational, degenerative scapegoating.”<sup>75</sup> When private prejudices gave way to collective violence, America’s delicate social peace faltered. National unity and morale declined, disheartened minority groups withdrew their support from national goals, and the plots of demagogues to seize power gained followers.

So conceived, the nature of racial “scapegoating” presented Allport with a grave problem, one that ran through virtually all liberal anti-racist thought in the 1930s and 1940s. Prejudice “stultified the mind,” and when acted upon caused socially destructive discrimination. “Scapegoating,” though, was an altogether different animal—“scapegoating” was nothing short of a catastrophe. However, locating the line between wrong-but-ultimately-non-threatening race prejudice, and truly dangerous outbreaks of racial “scapegoating” proved inherently difficult. What was the threshold of frustration or fear beyond which the individual’s emotional carrying capacity broke? What was the

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<sup>73</sup> Allport, “Bigot in Our Midst,” 161.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>75</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 4-8.

catalytic mix of conditions and psychological factors? Policing the line might make the difference between victory and defeat, but how to defend what one could not find? This seemed to be a problem that was unlikely to dissipate. Reflecting how large the economic depression that followed the First World War—and its attending racial conflict—loomed in the minds of Progressives like Allport, he noted that “when peace returns we have no guarantee that the psychological and environmental causes of scapegoating will be lessened.”<sup>76</sup> Moreover, “the smaller and more integrated world that will follow this war” promised only more ‘interracial contact.’<sup>77</sup>

To address the social problem of “scapegoating” Allport recommended a familiar litany of liberal anti-racists measures. Consciously employing an idiom that had become ubiquitous in the description of social problems by the late 1930s—“the analogy of preventive and curative medicine,” as he put it—Allport called “scapegoating” a “cancer in the social organism,” one that “must be controlled before it kills.”<sup>78</sup> But, the logic of Allport’s thinking suggested that “scapegoating” was a virus, carried by things like rumors and “tabloid goblins,” and infecting a body politic weakened by adverse social conditions. As such, the cures were obvious enough. First, the social conditions that lead to “scapegoating” had to be changed, namely by reducing economic insecurity through social provision and tamping down on competitiveness, and also by deploying “legal methods” to attack discrimination and outlaw “scapegoating” (this included dismantling segregation, which Allport strongly endorsed in the early 1940s). Second, anti-racists had

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<sup>76</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 8-9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 8; 68-9. The idiom of social disease in the American social sciences was suggested by Lawrence Frank in an influential essay published in 1936, and codified a few years later in his *Society as the Patient: Essays in Culture and Personality* (1948). It rested, of course, on the bedrock assumption that social problems were individual problems multiplied by population. On this see Herman, *Romance of American Psychology*, 35, and chapter 2 more generally. See also, Ernst Simmel, *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease* (1946), with forward by Gordon Allport.



to hammer away at “tabloid thinking” and other errant prejudices through public information campaigns, marking such things as enemies of democracy and Christianity.

But, to solve the intellectual problem posed by the essentially indeterminate nature of “scapegoating,” he took a different tack. He essentially projected it out onto white America. To Allport’s mind, the decision to act out one’s prejudices was just that—a decision. The impulse to “scapegoat,” he thought, could be “partly or wholly checked in minds that possess adequate sentiments of justice and fair play.”<sup>79</sup> Which was to say that the factors that determined whether or not a person “scapegoated” rested with their personality. Further, this was a conflict, even a contest that went on inside almost everyone.<sup>80</sup> Allport’s design was visible in his language, specifically his choice of subjects. Throughout his writings on prejudice, he wrote in the first person plural: “we manufacture tabloid goblins,” “our human tendency to revert,” “we have an impulse” to “scapegoat.” Allport saw the enemy of peace and justice, and it was ‘us.’ But, he also referred to a different subject in his analyses of prejudice, one to which he switched without ceremony, but to great effect. “It,” “the bigot,” “the bigot in our midst.” This was more than just an intellectual sleight of hand, more than a rhetorical strategy. It spoke directly to his sense of the nature of prejudice, and the nature of modern America. By turning his sights on “the bigot,” Allport reconfigured the ‘decision’ to “scapegoat” into a grand moral and social contest for the heart of American democracy.

***Allport’s Creation of the Bigoted Personality, or  
‘How We Learned to Start Worrying and Hate the Bigot’***

Allport constructed the image of “the bigot” as a useful political fiction. Conscious of the

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<sup>79</sup> Allport, *ABC’s of Scapegoating*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> This was itself a revision of an idea he expressed in 1940, namely that we experienced an internal conflict between ‘the fascist’ and the ‘democrat’ in each of us. See Pandora, *Rebels Within the Ranks*, 112-115.

need for wartime unity, as well as the larger questions of justice and peace, Allport was presented with an intellectual and moral problem of prejudice that mirrored his sense of the social problem prejudice posed for the nation. His inability to gauge the difference between a normal level of prejudice, one which could be effectively controlled, reduced, and eventually eradicated, and the level of race prejudice that constituted a threat to society spoke to a deeper tension—the inability to reconcile the utter pervasiveness of white racism with demands of peace and justice. Allport responded to this dilemma, in part, by redefining it altogether. Unable to determine the threshold at which the normal individual turned pathological, he instead drew a line between those people who could control their prejudices and those who could not.

By focusing on the pathological bigot as a type, Gordon Allport helped to crystalize the moral and political dimensions of race prejudice. Some people were simply “chronic scapegoaters,” he wrote, individuals “whose personalities represented a special menace” to society.<sup>81</sup> In a sense, then, he made “scapegoat” or a “tabloid” of “the bigot.” In doing so, he reinforced the idea that *most* Americans had the power to control their prejudiced impulses, shoring up the conceptually inchoate nature of ‘normal’ prejudice by defining the ‘abnormal.’ However useful this was as an intellectual maneuver, it also initiated a key turn in thinking about race prejudice: no longer simply a trait or an attitude that a person *held* about Negroes or Jews, “prejudice” came to imply the type of person someone *was*. Of course, in doing so, he also partially obscured more difficult and problematic questions about the nature of ‘normal’ race prejudice and its role in American culture and society. Which is to say, he established a normative sense of race prejudice without conceding the obvious—that America was a nation of bigots.

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<sup>81</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 45.

Allport's conception of the "the bigot" worked as a political fiction, but it was not without grounding in the science of "personality." Indeed, the drive to build a useable and reliable measure of prejudice as a personality trait had been gaining momentum for some time. As early as the mid-1920s, for instance, the Columbia Teachers College-trained psychologist Goodwin Watson created a series of tests of "fair-mindedness," "open-mindedness," and "freedom from prejudice."<sup>82</sup> By the end of the 1930s, the Columbia University-trained psychologist, Eugene Horowitz (he changed his name to Hartley in the early 1940s) began to deploy a more sophisticated gauge of race prejudice and tolerance of his own design, combining pencil-and-paper questionnaires, interviews, and other techniques.<sup>83</sup> Coming from a different angle, in the early 1940s a collection of psychologists and psychoanalysts based at the University of California at Berkeley developed tests specifically to measure anti-Semitism. The group, composed of two Americans, R. Nevitt Sanford and Daniel J. Levinson, and a Polish-Jewish refugee psychologist (by way of Vienna), Else Frenkel-Brunswik, published the initial results of their tests in psychological journals in 1944. By the end of the decade, though, their work

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<sup>82</sup> Goodwin Watson, *The Measure of Fair-Mindedness* (New York: Teacher's College: Columbia University, 1925).

<sup>83</sup> In the late-1930s, Columbia University and the "across the street" Union Theological Seminary formed a crucial nexus for activist-oriented the study of race prejudice. Its leader was the social psychologist Gardner Murphy, and it was populated by his wife, Lois Barclay Murphy, Goodwin Watson, Gene Hartley, his wife Ruth Horowitz, and Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Together, this group pioneered research into the formation of racial attitudes in children, and the development of racial identity, with Hartley and Horowitz's work providing crucial inspiration for the famous 'doll studies' that the Clarks used in their legal briefings for *Brown v. Board* (1954). Hartley created his own concept of the "prejudiced" and "tolerant" personality types through a series of studies he conducted beginning in 1938. But, for reasons that remain unclear, his work did not circulate beyond the private organizations who commissioned it until 1946, when it was published as *Studies in Prejudice*. According to Pandora, Allport was a friend and 'kindred spirit' of the Murphy's and certainly aware of the work going on at Columbia. But, I have not found any direct connections between Allport and Hartley. For instance, when Allport published his own study on the "prejudiced personality" in 1946 he makes no reference to Hartley parallel work. See Gordon W. Allport and Bernard M. Kramer, "Some Roots of Prejudice," *Journal of Psychology* 22 (1946). On prejudice and psychology at Columbia University, see Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, chapter 2 and 3. The book on Columbia University as a community of anti-fascist and anti-racist scholars and activists—the Boasian anthropologists, Dewey and his circle, Murphy and his, Jacques Barzun and Richard Hofstadter in history, the Lynd's in sociology—has yet to be written.

formed the substance of one of the landmark of post-war social thought—*The Authoritarian Personality*.<sup>84</sup>

After the War, Allport devised his own personality test for “prejudice,” specifically drawing from the techniques outlined by the California group. Allport calibrated his test to measure the significance of a series of factors in generating such prejudices, including general “insecurity,” “religiousness (or its lack),” “early traumatic experiences,” “poor intercultural educations,” parents’ attitudes, and “a misshapen philosophy of life,” among others. But, his stated aims were explicitly social in nature. Although they played central role in his thinking about prejudice, he was not interested in the “benevolent minds of the unprejudiced fifth of the population,” the existence of which multiple attitude surveys had suggested. Rather, his study sought to shed light on the “four-fifths of the American population” who evinced some form of prejudice. More exactly, though, he was targeting the underlying uncertainty that plagued the question of prejudice. It was “difficult to estimate what proportion is so virulently infected” as to pose a danger to society, he wrote, though “we know that tendencies to loot and to lynch lie close to the surface in the characters of many apparently sane and substantial citizens.” In the hopes of identifying these ‘substantial citizens,’ he sought out the “correlates of prejudice in a rank-and-file group of college students,” his description of Ivy League students as “rank-and file” revealing both an odd confusion about social class, as well as his sense that prejudice could be found nearly everywhere.<sup>85</sup>

He administered the test to a collections of more than 400 undergraduates from Dartmouth, Harvard, and Radcliffe, believing that such a group contained a sample of

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<sup>84</sup> Theodor W Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, Abridged ed. (New York: Norton, 1982). Discussion of the “authoritarian personality” project ensues below.

<sup>85</sup> Allport and Kramer, “Some Roots of Prejudice,” 9.

personality structures not “in any significant way atypical” relative to “a more unselected population”—an assumption that pervaded early studies of prejudice and personality. After a series of questions about personal background and past experience with minority groups, including “Negroes,” “Jews,” “Catholics,” “Italians,” “Irish,” and “Mexicans,” the test inquired after policy preferences (was it “wise to make legislative attempts to improve the opportunities of minority groups”), personal beliefs about race (“is Negro blood the same as white blood”), and levels of agreement or disagreement with a series of race-specific statements (“I can imagine myself marrying a Catholic person,” “It is best that Jews should have their own fraternities and sororities”). Allport included questions about the subject’s sense of the origins of their opinions (parents, church, their own experience), the extent to which they considered themselves victims of prejudice, their ideas about the level of prejudice held by other people, and their general sense of the state of the nation. And, lastly, he devised a measure of “racial awareness,” asking subjects to identify whether or not a person was “a Jew” based on photographs of faces.<sup>86</sup>

By its very structure, Allport’s analysis revealed the existence of a “prejudiced personality” type. Allport assigned the answers to each question a numerical value, which was then tallied up to produce a raw “score” of a person’s level of prejudice. Based on these scores, he then divided up the sample into four categories, one each for “high” and “low” scorers, and two categories representing the middle. The answers provided by the “high” and “low” scoring groups were then cross-correlated to reveal commonalities. For instance, high-scorers —“prejudiced people”—showed a marked propensity toward “clinging to parental patterns,” believed themselves to have been routinely “victimized,” and generally feared “fraud and trickery.” Those subjects with lower scores, by contrast,

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<sup>86</sup> A method, incidentally, updated and deployed in 2010 by social psychologists at Brown University.

tended to “sympathize with the underdog,” display “a critical attitude” toward the worldview of their parents, and lack a refined sense of racial differences.<sup>87</sup> In this way, questionnaires and statistical computation could reveal the psychological underpinnings of different types of people.

Allport’s findings, and those of the other personality studies he connected his with, *did not* serve as the foundation of his judgments about “the prejudiced personality.” Rather, these data filled in an intellectual scaffolding he already had well under construction. Indeed, the work on display in his formal study of the personality traits of the prejudiced person—the work that showed that discrete attitudes, correlated together, revealed underlying personality types—was already stitched into his thinking. After finishing his dissertation years earlier, Allport had undertaken the traditional post-graduate ritual of studying in Germany. There he came under the influence of William Stern, a German psychologist famed for developing the idea of psychological ‘types,’ among other intellectuals steeped in different ways of thinking about the “personality” (as in, outside the empirical tradition of American psychology). So thoroughly had Allport absorbed this kind of thinking that years later, his student, friend, and fellow scholar of race prejudice, Thomas Pettigrew, thought to call his mentor “a closet Gestaltist.”<sup>88</sup> Allport’s ideal of “intuitionism” as the proper means of accessing the personality spoke directly to the importance of this style of analysis to his outlook. It is unsurprising, then, that Allport’s image of the ‘bigoted personality type’ not only preceded his formal study thereof, but also far exceeded in scope and detail what questionnaires and identification tests could justify. The need to produce a durable image of “the bigot,” a political fiction

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<sup>87</sup> Allport and Kramer, “Some Roots of Prejudice,” 37-9.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas F. Pettigrew, “The Ultimate Attribution Error: Extending Allport’s Cognitive Analysis of Prejudice,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 5, 4 (October 1, 1979): 461 -476.

that could be deployed against the threat of racism, trumped the exactitude of science.

Early on, for instance, Allport used the occasion of his “rumor clinic” column of July 19, 1943—just weeks after the Detroit race-riots broke out—to identify the source of America’s race problem. Identified as “The Chairman of Harvard’s Department of Psychology,” brought into the clinic to answer why certain Americans were “spreading hate-rumors against their fellow citizens,” Allport declared that “racial rumors [were] the MOST DANGEROUS” type of rumors. But, more to the point, he used his explanation to turn a spotlight directly onto the “spreader of racial rumors.” “The Detroit Slanderers,” he wrote, “roused mobs that behaved like the most bestial of Nazis,” embittering one-tenth of the population against the War effort, and providing “Hitler’s only hope” of victory. Why would such people engage in “racial slander,” Allport wondered. The “racial gossip,” he thought, “feels insecure in his job or deprived of the good things in life.” causing him to develop “a deep-seated anger.” Not knowing “what he is so angry about or whom to blame,” he just picks out someone to attack and “lets go.” The fault for such attacks “almost never” lies with the victim; rather the “cause of Negro-hate...lies in the economic, family or personal tangles of the hater himself.”<sup>89</sup>

Allport refined his profile of the “race-hater” in a number of ways. The defining characteristic of these “scapegoat addicts” was that his or her prejudices were woven “into the fabric of the personality,” and became a “style of life.”<sup>90</sup> While the particular prejudices a person held depended on the kinds of attitudes and stereotypes to which they were exposed—in other words, to culture—Allport thought that bigotry “spreads like a grease spot” once it “stains” the individual worldview, meaning that the person who held

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<sup>89</sup> Gordon Allport, “The Rumor Clinic,” Boston *Sunday Herald*, July 18, 1943. Allport reprinted the column in Allport and Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*, 21-2.

<sup>90</sup> Allport and Kramer, “Some Roots of Prejudice,” 35.

strong anti-black prejudices would also eventually become anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic.<sup>91</sup> Once race prejudice comes to play a significant part in the ‘life-economy’ of “the bigot,” Allport thought, “It does little good to attempt with forceps of fact to extricate from the warped mind erroneous ideas concerning a particular race or religion. The warping is systematic; it cannot be repaired locally.” Because those people who “have taken scapegoating as their way of life” are dissuaded by neither logic or evidence, “appeals to evidence, exhortations to brotherly love, intercultural education” largely ineffectual.<sup>92</sup>

Allport identified several variations of the bigoted personality type. The first and most prominent of these was the “compulsive scapegoater.” Also characterized as a “paranoiac,” the “compulsive scapegoater” believed himself persecuted by shadowy (Jewish) forces, and aggressively sought “revenge on his persecutors.” Suffering from a general “intellectual and emotional impoverishment,” these types lacked the “ability to cope with [frustration and fear] on the socially acceptable plane.” Further, wanting for creativity and the capacity for genuine sociality, he or she could “only feel their own worth by pulling others down,” and craved the kind of excitement delivered by “witch-hunting.” Besides the compulsive bigot, Allport recognized a “conforming scapegoater,” who fell in behind scapegoating leaders—who Allport later branded as “super-bigots”—because they “like to conform,” and gained “a perverted feeling of security,” feelings of “smug” self-satisfaction, and an inflated ego by joining the “‘whiter, ‘more Christian,’ ‘better’ group.”<sup>93</sup> Lastly, he identified the “calculating scapegoater,” the “demagogue in

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<sup>91</sup> The ‘grease spot’ metaphor runs throughout Allport’s writing on prejudice. See Allport, “Bigot in Our Midst,” 168-9.

<sup>92</sup> Allport and Kramer, “Some Roots of Prejudice,” 38; Allport, “Bigot in Our Midst,” 165-9.

<sup>93</sup> Allport, “The Rumor Clinic.”



whom the desire to gain power looms large,” and who will use the emotional needs of others as weapons.<sup>94</sup>

These varieties notwithstanding, Allport created a general profile of the “character structure of the bigot,” outlining the interlocking emotional and cognitive failures that formed his distinct mentality.<sup>95</sup> The “bigot’s mental life” was marred by an incapacity to feel empathy, an “inability to take the role of the other fellow,” which resulted in feeling that other people are “strange creatures capable of sinister motives and deeds.” Further, the bigot “cannot tolerate his own feelings of guilt,” making him “projection prone.” A host of cognitive failure attended these emotional liabilities, including a propensity towards shallow and stereotyped thinking. Profoundly intolerant of diversity and variability, the bigot agreed with broad, totalizing generalizations about groups as a matter of course—“The Negro, if unacceptable as a brother-in-law, is unacceptable as a colleague, neighbor, voter.”<sup>96</sup> And, he refused to evaluate individuals on their own worth, always subsuming anyone different than himself into a groups category. Further, “incapable of grasping explanations of the world’s ills in terms of social, political or economic forces,” he or she was susceptible to the “personalization” of social problems, or got carried way by “the mask of a symbol.” Of course, this patterned blindness extended to the bigot himself, rendering him incapable “Self-criticism, self-knowledge, [or] self-blame”—all parts of a healthy, modern personality.<sup>97</sup>

Limited by these emotional and cognitive traits, the bigot was forced into

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<sup>94</sup> Allport, *ABC's of Scapegoating*, 47-48.

<sup>95</sup> Drawn from a host of sources, including Allport, “Brotherhood or Chaos”; Allport, “Scapegoating and its Remedies”; Allport, “The Bigot in Our Midst,” Gordon Allport, radio script on “scapegoating,” under auspices of the Institute for American Democracy, Sunday May 12, 1946 (Gordon Allport Papers, Harvard University Archives series 4118)

<sup>96</sup> Allport, “The Bigot in our Midst,” 166-7.

<sup>97</sup> Allport, “Scapegoating and its Remedies,” 7.

possession of a distinct worldview, one that stood in direct contradistinction to the democratic ideology that suffused New Deal liberalism. Suffering “under tyranny of his own prejudice,” and unable to “learn from experience or from moral sentiments,” the bigot developed “a rigid and hostile philosophy of life,” or as Allport also described it, a “tight little, hard little, self-centered philosophy.”<sup>98</sup> This worldview had a few key hallmarks. Evoking the same ideology that historian Richard Hofstadter was in the process of naming “social Darwinism,” Allport wrote that the bigot views “the world as a perilous jungle,” and regards life “not as an invitation to cooperation,” but rather “as an arena of struggle where opponents must be annihilated.”<sup>99</sup> Although “sprinkled with verbal pieties in church and school” about fairness and equality, the bigot believes that only his own “class and kind” deserve “democratic privileges,” while those different than him do not.<sup>100</sup> And, to accommodate this view, he arranged the world into a hierarchy of groups ranging from inferior to superior—with his group, naturally, on top.

Paranoid, hidebound, aggressive, competitive, lacking empathy, clichéd, cowardly, priggish, conformist. “Tense, humorless, [and] spastic.”<sup>101</sup> “Himself likely to be a bootlicker, an abject slave of a leader.”<sup>102</sup> And, consumed by a “fetish of hate.”<sup>103</sup> These traits of “the bigot” were more than just unappealing. They were also the impulses that led to the Great Depression and to the War. In Allport’s imagination, then, race prejudice, war-mongering, and economic and social conservatism were all bound up with each other, and all rooted in traits of bigoted personalities. Further, the values of the bigot were

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<sup>98</sup> Allport, “Bigot in Our Midst,” 168.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-6. Richard Hofstadter published *Social Darwinism in American Thought* in 1944.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-6.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>102</sup> Allport, “Scapegoating and its Remedies,” 9.

<sup>103</sup> Allport, “The Bigot in Our Midst,” 168.

also the values that stood against the new world that waited on the other side of the present crisis. Writing about how “our bigot’s mind work[s] on the problem of peace,” he noted that “the bigot” “wants peace only on his own terms... [namely] peace with white supremacy, or a peace that destroys the New Deal, or a peace of revenge upon the Japanese, or a peace that will be followed by ‘the job we have to do on the Jews.’”<sup>104</sup> All of which meant that “the bigot” wanted no peace at all. Allport’s description of the bigoted personality, of those in the possession of a pathological attachment to race prejudice and racial scapegoating, were nothing less than the enemies of ‘mankind.’

In Allport’s analysis, the bigoted personality type had a natural antithesis in the “democratic” personality type. Possessed of “character structures that are sound,” these democratic types generally supported progressive political causes, thought critically about received wisdom, and possessed keen insight into their own psychology.<sup>105</sup> Allport acknowledged that science had yet to figure out the conditions that left “the individual free from stultifying prejudice,” or that facilitated “wholesome and normal states of mind,” noting parenthetically that “If we knew...we might aim to create more like them.”<sup>106</sup> (The psychological engineering impulse never far below the surface.) He encouraged research into the structure of the democratic personality, and identified a few prominent examples of the type: scientists, people of deep religious faith (as opposed to those people who hold shallow religious beliefs), cosmopolitans (“those well traveled and observant of other cultures”), and those with a good sense of humor. And yet, notwithstanding the lack of sustained research into the democratic personality, Allport knew the kind of people to which he was referring—“mature personalities” of the kind he

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>105</sup> Allport, “Brotherhood or Chaos,” 5.

<sup>106</sup> Allport, “Bigot in our Midst,” 169.

described in the late 1930s. Employing a particularly vivid metaphor, Allport highlighted the contrast: “In the manner of the early adolescent who follows his gang leader, the bigot prefers his backbone outside (in the leader) rather than inside, where in the mature personality it belongs.”<sup>107</sup>

Allport tied his notion of types to a broader vision of society, one that he animated by a central conflict. “The bigot” and “the democratic” personalities were more than just psychological types for Allport. In short, he projected these characters onto society as a whole, or more accurately, onto America’s white majority. Allport’s sense of the social composition of American whiteness was vague. He noted the existence of class differences, and in some of his speeches he suggested that racial hatred was more prevalent among the lower classes. And, he nodded to the prevalence of regional variations, though here too he suggested they carried only marginal significance. Instead, he recast white America according to a different matrix: a thin slice of bigoted types, or “aggressive antis” as he called them, making up “5-10%” of the population, the “unprejudiced fifth” of tolerant types, and a vast middle arrayed in between.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, in Allport’s imagination, these groups were arrayed in a conflict, the outcome of which was going to determine the fate of the United States as a democratic nation. “A significant battle is being waged here in America today between these two types of character”—the bigot and the democratic. “Shrewd and emotionally roused

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<sup>107</sup> Allport, “Bigot in Our Midst,” 167.

<sup>108</sup> More broadly, Allport adhered to “majority-minority,” or “intergroup relations” notion of society: America was composed of distinct groups of differing constitution and size whose interactions could be characterized by degrees of “friction” or “hostility.” In this line of thinking, social progress consisted in dual movement toward greater degrees of “cooperation” or even “brotherhood” between groups, while at the same time such groups were dissolving into mere aggregations of individuals. Betraying a lack of clarity that characterized the “intergroup relations” worldview, Allport thought that minorities could be racial, national, ethnic, religious, or even class-based in nature. As I read it, the social dimension of his analysis of prejudice essentially extended this “intergroup” logic to whites. Allport’s rough percentages appear throughout his writings. See *Ibid.*, 164-5.

representatives are busy on both sides, [sic] and social forces are working in both directions.” The ends in mind: “Both sides are struggling to influence people’s minds, which, though they have their tabloid tendencies and their modicum of bigotry, are nonetheless half conscious of the meaning of the American tradition of fair play and of the requirements of democratic decency.”<sup>109</sup>

On the one side, “the bigot” worked to convince us to throw over our democratic way of life. “The primary lesson of this war,” Allport wrote, “not at all learned by Americans, is the connection between fascism and the latent bigotry in people who are not technically fascists”—those people in the middle. Although they did not represent anything like a majority of the population, the “large nucleus” of “aggressive antis” in American society were constantly engaged in trying to “convert the wavering” over to their way of thinking. “Our paranoid bigots are busily engaged in rousing hatred against this scapegoat or that... seeking power over the masses in order to cajole them into a similar welter of regressive hatreds.” Although such hatreds served their own emotional ends for many bigots, they also served a larger purpose. Invoking “democratic symbols to justify their attacks,” including states’ rights, private initiative, and freedom of speech, among others, bigots hoped to use race prejudices as the psychological opening through which “fascism can come into this country under the banner of ‘democracy.’” Here, on the main battle line of the home front, the fighting was fierce, and the outcome uncertain. As Allport saw it, while “we have [Nazi, paranoid-type bigots] in America, we have not yet had, except in certain localities and groups, the spectacle of erstwhile mature personalities collapsing and regressing en masse.”<sup>110</sup> At least not yet.

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<sup>109</sup> Allport, “Bigot in our Midst,” 171.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-171.

“On the other side of the battle line,” Allport wrote, “we have much of the press, most of the churches, many stalwart opinion leaders, including teachers, statesmen, writers.” Joining these embodiments of “our Christian-democratic-scientific ethos” was, of course, Gordon Allport himself, and the cadre of progressive, politically active, and anti-racists psychologists of from which he hailed. If the decisive factor in preventing America from turning toward fascism was the resistance of average Americans to exactly mass “regression,” then the role of the democratic types was clear. Open rumor clinics to beat back the racial falsehoods that “the bigot” used to spread his hate. Use the tools of the state to give people some ‘backbone’ reinforcement through laws against discrimination and racial slander, and effective policing. And, of course, make broad guarantees of social security and employment to reduce social tensions, and make social and cultural change more amenable.

In the longer term, progress on problems of prejudice was going to come from education. Ever the booster for the practical application of his discipline, Allport imagined a special educational role for psychology, namely efforts to strengthen the egos of white Americans. These included, among other things, rigorous education about the mechanisms of racial “scapegoating,” self-awareness being more valuable than rote learning of anti-racist propaganda. As seen in the character structure of the tolerant personality, the underlying determinant to controlling one’s race prejudices was “insight,” a critical capacity for self-reflection that enables people to understand what made prejudice so appealing. “Insight,” Allport thought, makes people conscious of their own mental processes, prompting them to question the motivations, irrational attitudes, and ingrained habits that drive people to acts of “scapegoating.” And, people developed

“insight,” among other ways, by rejecting the “miasmatic philosophy of the jungle” in favor of ideologies that inculcate respect for the individual, chief among these, democracy and Christianity.<sup>111</sup> More than teaching people the facts about racial difference—those these were undoubtedly important—“Education for democracy... and for Christianity” teaches “people to suspect the bigoted regions of their own mind.”<sup>112</sup>

In this way, the larger project to which Gordon Allport dedicated his psychology, rescuing the “personality” from the forces of homogenization in the modern world, dovetailed with efforts to save the modern world from itself. Defeating race prejudice in the individual personality required the same processes of self-cultivation that he laid out as the path toward developing a healthy, flexible, vigorous “mature personality.” Both required extending the self to see the world from the perspective of others. Both required “self-Objectification” through insight and humor. And, both required developing a “unified philosophy of life.”<sup>113</sup> The possibilities of a permanent peace and the possibilities of individual self-development depended, ultimately, on each other.

***“The Bigot” in the Post-War World, or  
How Americans Learned to Stop Worrying and Hate the Bigot***

Gordon Allport’s image of the “bigot” was of a person who used their prejudiced attitudes “as a crutch,” whose prejudice had come to play “a necessary” role in their emotional “life-economy.”<sup>114</sup> More than holding prejudices, such people had a bigoted “character-structure,” or, as he later took to calling it, an “authoritarian personality.”<sup>115</sup> In identifying “the bigot” as an “authoritarian” type, Allport was acknowledging how his work on prejudice intersected with a rich vein of psycho-cultural critique, one first mined

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<sup>111</sup> Allport and Kramer, “Some Roots of Prejudice,” 36.

<sup>112</sup> Allport, “Bigot in our Midst,” 168.

<sup>113</sup> Allport, *Personality*, xii.

<sup>114</sup> Allport, “Prejudice: A Problem in Psychological and Social Causation,” 11-12.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

by the émigré psychoanalyst and social critic Erich Fromm. Fromm first reported on the “authoritarian character” in his 1941 best seller *Escape from Freedom*, a historical exegesis of the psychological perils of modernity for the individual psyche.<sup>116</sup> This figure, Fromm thought, represented a maladaptation of the self to the erosion of external forms of authority that characterized the modern age, as those people psychologically unprepared for freedom sought refuge in submission to figures of authority. The “authoritarian” represented a natural antipode to Allport’s normative ideal type, the “mature” or “democratic” personality, someone who had managed to develop a “fully-integrated” personality amidst the disintegrating forces of modernity. As such, it provided a ready-to-hand template for the psychology of “the bigot.”

In the 1940s, the authoritarian character type took on a life of its own. Besides Fromm, the historian of Nazism Wilhelm Reich, and psychoanalytic social critics like Abraham Maslow and Franz Alexander each developed critiques of American and European culture that examined the authoritarian character.<sup>117</sup> Few of these intellectuals, though, sketched out the life of this figure with the startling vividness of novelist Richard Wright. A voracious consumer of sociological and psychological literature, Wright used his readings in social and behavioral science to draw his portrait of the Bigger Thomas, the black anti-hero of his 1936 *Native Son*. Wright’s book entered the canon of American literature almost as soon as it was published, placing him among the most famous of American writers, a position he used to proffer his own brand of fierce social criticism of the American racism. In 1945, he used the forward to the monumental *Black*

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<sup>116</sup> Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, inc, 1941).

<sup>117</sup> See Fromm, *Man for Himself: an Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (1947); Franz Alexander, *Our Age of Unreason: a Study of the Irrational Forces in Social Life* (Lippincott, 1942); Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (Orgone Institute Press, 1946).



*Metropolis*, sociologist Horace Cayton and anthropologist St. Clair Drake's study of the oppressive conditions of African American life in Chicago, to turn his critical eye on the psychology of the white racist. Wright's portrait was not of the southern demagogue or the working-class anti-Semite, but rather of a more chilling character.

It can be known that a native born white man, the end-product of all our strivings, educated, healthy, apparently mentally normal, having the stability of a wife and family, possessing the security of a good job with high wages, enjoying more freedom than any other county on earth accords its citizen, *but devoid of the most elementary satisfactions*, will seize upon an adolescent, zoot-suited Mexican and derive deep feelings of pleasure from stomping his guts upon the pavements of Los Angeles.<sup>118</sup>

Wright's baleful image of white racism laid bear the worst fears of liberals like Gordon Allport, exposing possibilities that rarely found expression in their writings in the 1940s. Until, that is, Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford completed their landmark *The Authoritarian Personality*, which codified the image of the bigoted type with unprecedented exactitude.

The roots of the authoritarian personality project went back to the 1920s, when the not-yet-exiled Institute for Social Research commissioned Erich Fromm to undertake a study of German working-class attitudes toward fascism. Founded in 1923 by a group of mostly Jewish radical intellectuals, the Institute—commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School—took as its aim to figure out why the industrial working class of German had failed to fulfill their historically-appointed role as revolutionary proletarians. The answer to this riddle, they thought, had to reside somewhere in the proletarian psyche, whose inner workings they sought to unpack through their own critical reading of Freud.

Fromm, who never officially joined the Frankfurt School—neither doctor enough to be an official analyst, nor Marxist enough to be a 'critical theorist,' Fromm's status as a

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<sup>118</sup> Richard Wright's forward to St. Clair Drake and Horace Roscoe Cayton, *Black Metropolis: a Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (University of Chicago Press, 1945), xxvii.

perennial outsider left him no choice but to become one of the most widely-read and best-selling social critics of the twentieth century—conducted his study of anti-Semitism in the working-class mentality under this mandate. But, he never completed his work, and much of his original data was lost when the School was forced to flee from the Nazis in 1933.<sup>119</sup>

In the early 1940s, with the Frankfurt School relocated to New York, its director, Max Horkheimer, set out to revive the anti-Semitism project. In need of funding, he approached the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in 1941, which had sought to fund a study of American anti-Semitism. A skilled and ruthless institutional operator, Horkheimer secured his grant in 1943 in part by bending the aims of the project to appeal to the concerns of American Jewry, the preferred research methods of the American academic establishment, and a broader American audience. He recast fascist anti-Semitism as a threat to liberty, democracy and the American middle class, decentering the Institute's focus on "state capitalism," the working class, and the *petite bourgeoisie*.<sup>120</sup> The study of the authoritarian personality was one of five parallel projects, all funded by the AJC, and all directed by Horkheimer under the rubric "Studies in Prejudice." Along with Paul Massing's history of "political anti-Semitism" in Germany, *Rehearsal for Destruction*, Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman's study of demagogues and anti-Semitic propaganda, *Prophets of Deceit*, Nathan Ackerman and Marie Jahoda's in-depth

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<sup>119</sup> Nearly 30 years after its initial publication, Martin Jay's history of the Frankfurt School remains indispensable. More recently, Thomas Wheatland has traced out in intricate detail the who's and how's and what for's of the Frankfurt Schools American sojourn. For a brief and cogent analysis of the School and its engagement with the problem of racism, Richard King's recent offering, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals* illuminates much. See, Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination; a History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009); King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals*.

<sup>120</sup> Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 237-41. On the significance of this shift in the School's orientation, see 241.

psychoanalysis of a pair of pathological anti-Semites, *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder*, and Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz's analysis of the racial attitudes of American World War II vets, *Dynamics of Prejudice*, its purpose was to provide a comprehensive analysis of anti-Semitism in the modern world.<sup>121</sup> Its purpose was also to provide scientific grounding, if not direction, for the anti-racist propaganda and organizing that had emerged as the central thrust of the AJC's anti-fascist wartime activism. Needless to say, they got more than they had bargained for.<sup>122</sup>

Gordon Allport first met Max Horkheimer in the winter of 1945. As was his want, Horkheimer reached out to prominent American academicians working in fields that related to his own interests, and Allport's work on prejudice and minority group relations caught the German's attention the previous year. Particularly regarding its development of personality testing techniques, Allport approved of the overall design of the project, recommended researchers who might help with its executions, and in May of the same year, signed on as an official co-director.<sup>123</sup> Although he was a critic of American capitalism, Allport brooked little regard for Marxism, and his hostility to Freudian thinking was already legendary by then. But, as he saw it, the needs of the moment and the gravity of the problem far outweighed such philosophical differences. In his preface to the first collection of findings from the project, Ernst Simmel's *Anti-Semitism: An*

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<sup>121</sup> Paul W Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction; a Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Harper, 1949); Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit; a Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (New York: Harper, 1949); Nathan W Ackerman and Marie Jahoda, *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder, a Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (New York: Harper, 1950); Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, *Dynamics of Prejudice; a Psychological and Sociological Study of Veterans* (New York: Harper, 1950).

<sup>122</sup> Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Svonkin details how the findings of the studies—that prejudice would not respond well to open educational or counter-propaganda efforts—stood in direct opposition to the general philosophical position and strategic designs of the America Jewish Committee's anti-racist activism.

<sup>123</sup> Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 250.

*Emotional Disease* (1946), Allport made his position clear. “No petty doctrinal difference” should be allowed to break the “common front among all mental and social scientists [sic] being forged to fight anti-democratic evils in our generation.” The “brilliantly arresting” findings of Adorno, Horkheimer, Sanford and Frenkel-Brunsik, he thought, were welcome “aids” in the fight against “so contagious and complex an evil” as anti-Semitism.<sup>124</sup>

The concept driving the project was to wed the Freudian-Marxist synthesis developed by the Frankfurt school to the empirical methodologies for examining the personality under development among American psychologists. The goal was to provide psychological insights into the appeal of virulent political anti-Semitism in the US.<sup>125</sup> To that end—and to make up the Institute’s utter lack of experience in conducting empirical social or psychological research—Horkheimer reached out to the group of American social psychologists at Berkeley that called themselves the Public Opinion Research Group, and whose members, R. Nevitt Sanford, Else Frenkel-Bruswik, and her student, Daniel Levinson, had already been at work devising means to study the psychology of anti-Semitism.<sup>126</sup> Building off of their existing methods, the team administered questionnaires to over 2000 people (including 700 college students) in 1945-6. Following similar lines to the test that Allport deployed for his study of prejudice, the team created separate tests for ethnocentrism (E-scale), anti-Semitism (AS-scale), political-economic conservatism (PEC-scale), and most famously, fascism (F-scale), which proceeded by asking questions that had no direct bearing on racial groups or political issues, but

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<sup>124</sup> Ernst Simmel, *Anti-Semitism, a Social Disease* (New York: International universities press, 1946), viii-ix.

<sup>125</sup> Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 243

<sup>126</sup> Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 245.

focused instead on attitudes about child-rearing, proper attitudes toward parents, homosexuality, and much else (revealing the psychoanalytical bent of the authors). These were combined with open-ended “projective” questions—“What would you do if you had only six months to live, and could do anything you wanted”—designed to elicit the values and conflicts that marked the subject’s personality. The group then selected subjects from among the top and bottom quarters of “scorers” on the E-scale—half men, half women, totaling 80 in all—for more intensive interviews and for Thematic Apperception Tests (responses to a given set of pictures chosen so as to compare responses).<sup>127</sup>

Theodore Adorno completed the work of interpretation and synthesis, compiling the data and interview reports to conduct “qualitative” analyses of the deeper interpenetration of ideology and personality. The scales showed that people who scored high on the general ethnocentrism scale also scored high for anti-Semitism and conservatism (although less so for the latter). These correlations suggested that “underlying personality trends” rather than particular experiences or specific hatred were ultimately the source of prejudiced attitudes. The nature of these “personality trends” were revealed in the F-scale scores, namely an unconscious rigid adherence to conventional ways of thinking, aggressiveness, difficulty sympathizing with others, superstitiousness, an affinity for stereotyping, and an attraction to toughness and power, among other traits. These were people who, overwhelmed by the complications of modern political and economic forces, engaged in “ticket thinking,” and in personalizing

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<sup>127</sup> Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, chapter 1 lays out the design of the study.

political problems for ease of understanding.<sup>128</sup>

Adorno synthesized these findings into a series of coherent portraits of “the fascist character,” whose underlying “syndrome” could take a number of forms. Adorno thought that some such personalities displayed only “surface resentment,” meaning that they used prejudices to “rationalize” and “overcome overt difficulties in their own existence,” but have maintained at least some ability to rationally explain their prejudices. This is contrasted with the “‘conventional’ syndrome, in whom stereotypes have been “integrated within the personality as part an parcel of general conformity” (a parallel to Allport’s notion of the “conformist scapegoater”). The main “authoritarian” syndrome was characterized by a “blind belief in authority” combined with a “readiness to attack those who are deemed weak,” stemming from an over-identification with parental authority. “The Crank,” paranoid and driven “to build up a spurious inner world” by their frustrations with the outer world, clings to their prejudices as a “pseudoreality.” And, the most dangerous type, the “manipulative” syndrome, whose emphasis on “doing things” and instrumental view of other people “predisposes them to totalitarian solutions.” All of these variants of the authoritarian personality were highly susceptible to joining some kind of fascist group, or following some authoritarian political leader.<sup>129</sup>

Both in its overall design of and in its characterization of the authoritarian type, *The Authoritarian Personality* project resonated strongly with Allport’s conception of the “the bigot.” The group located the origins of the authoritarian character in the rigid childrearing practices of the American family, and although he rejected their fealty to Oedipal analyses, Allport put increasing emphasis on early childhood as the formative

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<sup>128</sup> Adorno presented his “Qualitative Studies of Ideology” in part four of the book, chapters 16-19. *Ibid.*, 603-786.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 753-770.

period in the development of bigoted types in the early 1950s. Further, he agreed with their assessment that people possessing prejudiced character structures—the people who represented the greatest threat to society—were unreachable by anti-racist counter-propaganda and immune to moral suasion.<sup>130</sup> *The Authoritarian Personality* confirmed Allport's belief that "prejudice is often so deeply embedded in character-structure that it cannot be changed unless the entire inner economy of life is overhauled."<sup>131</sup> As such, it reinforced his sense that much of what counted for anti-racist activism—anti-racist counter-propaganda—held little hope of actually reaching those people who posed the greatest problem. Whatever the message or however cleverly it was pitched, "the bigot" would ignore it, discount it, or convert it to fit his worldview.

But, Allport's thinking on the nature of prejudice diverged sharply from the underlying currents that moved *The Authoritarian Personality*. Adorno thought that the social forces of capitalist modernity, conveyed to the individual self through the family structure, created fragile, unbalanced personalities, and that these personalities sought to fill their emptiness with submission to authorities and by scapegoating of minority groups. On principle alone, Allport objected to drawing the kinds of tight connections Adorno drew between social structure and character structure, believing as he did that the individual psyche always had some room to develop its way of out its surroundings. More specifically, although Allport was a stern critic of capitalism and of modernity, his critiques had their limits, and those limits had been reached by the late 1940s. To him, the

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<sup>130</sup> This amounted to an implicit critique of Myrdal, the other totem. Having arrived at this conclusion as some years earlier, Allport personally undertook an experiment in anti-racist 'group therapy' with an assemblage of Boston Police officers. He thought that, perhaps, some form of "catharsis" might let pressure off the personality, thereby giving it some space to make more substantive changes. He reported limited success.

<sup>131</sup> Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 505.

Depression and the War had showed that the American self was not so fragile. To him, the personalities formed under the American regime of liberal democracy—whatever that system’s flaws—had proven themselves more robust, more stable than Adorno had imagined they would. Allport believed that, for the most part, Americans had sufficient strength of personality to resist the predations of “the bigot.” As he put the matter in 1946, “May it not be that *most* (not, of course, the paranoid type of bigot) have a sufficiently strong ego-structure to resist the depredations of anti-Semitism”—or other forms of race prejudice—“if, as decent and democratic citizens, they are warned of its perils and its insidious modes of operation?”<sup>132</sup> Allport had faith that the answer to this question was yes. Of course, the very fact that he phrased his faith in the form of a question showed that it was deep, but not a limitless.

#### **The Nature of Prejudice and the Need for ‘Further Research’**

No sooner had Gordon Allport completed his masterful synthesis, *The Nature of Prejudice*, than nine aged men in Washington, D.C. punched a gaping hole right in the middle of it. Allport had been a vociferous supporter of the NAACP’s efforts to dismantle segregation and a regular advisor to the legal team’s lead social scientist, Kenneth Clark. He rejoiced at the decision, but despaired at the court’s gradualist, “all deliberate speed” mandate. As he interpreted it, the psychological research showed that a firm hand in executing the order would engender compliance—an insight garnered from the notion that those people with “authoritarian personalities” would submit to government authority. He interpreted the eruption of “massive resistance” across the South and the showdown at Little Rock as signs of “a failure of psychological strategy,” or rather the failure of psychologists to press their case effectively. At the time he

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<sup>132</sup> Allport’s preface Simmel, ed., *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*, vii.



completed revisions for the second, paperback edition of *The Nature of Prejudice* in 1958, Allport still held out hope that the tenor of southern resistance—their “respectable” pleas for “states’ rights” had not yet devolved into calls for “keeping the nigger in his place”—portended “a hopeful outcome to the current impasse.”<sup>133</sup> Lynchings had become “virtually unknown,” he wrote, few were openly arguing for “white supremacy,” and southern “folkways” were changing. His hopes proved fanciful.

Allport’s misjudgment notwithstanding, *The Nature of Prejudice* was an achievement. The book reflected many of the same strengths that he displayed in his paradigm-setting *Personality* of nearly twenty years earlier—and some of the same weaknesses. In keeping with his generally ecumenical approach to knowledge, Allport drew together a truly massive amount of research and thinking on prejudice, from both within and beyond his own areas of expertise, including the work of the Marxist sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox, whose brilliant and earth-scorching *Race, Caste, and Class* had been largely ignored since its publication in 1948.<sup>134</sup> Years later, Allport admitted that the table of contents—the intellectual architecture of the book—stood among his proudest achievements. And rightly so, as he imposed a coherent organizational structure on a sprawling body of scholarship. He derived that structure by creating a hierarchy of causation, moving outward from the prejudiced act or thought to the “prejudiced personality,” the immediate social context, the broader socio-cultural sphere, and lastly to large-scale historical and economic causes of prejudice. Each of these constituted its own theoretical approach to prejudice, Allport thought, and only by considering them all could someone hope to get a solid grip on the problem. “There is no

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<sup>133</sup> Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, xxii.

<sup>134</sup> Oliver C Cox, *Caste, Class, & Race; a Study in Social Dynamics*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1948).

master key” to the problem of prejudice, he wrote, “rather, what we have... is a ring of keys, each of which opens one gate of understanding.”<sup>135</sup>

Even as his “eclectic” approach gave structure to the field of prejudice research, it also papered over sharp intellectual and ideological conflicts. After all, theories of prejudice grounded in the notion of an irreducible and irrational need for a “scapegoat” operated under a fundamentally different set of assumptions than theories that located the origins of prejudice in class conflict. These were two competing vision of society itself. While not mutually exclusive—as Ashley Montagu and Hortense Powdermaker showed, “scapegoating” could be seen as a tool in a system of economic domination—imagining society as an ‘antagonistic cooperative’ of self-generating ethnic groups moving toward extermination or amalgamation was very different than imagining it as divided by economic classes born of divergent relationships to the means of production.<sup>136</sup> But, by holding these at different ‘levels’ of causation, Allport contained them with his broader interpretive schema.

Of course, Allport was a psychologist, and a personality psychologist at that, lending him “a bias,” he admitted, that tilted *The Nature of Prejudice* in favor “psychodynamic” and “personality” approaches to the problem. This was more than mere disciplinary boosterism. As he saw it, “the structure of society in which one lives, long-standing economic and cultural traditions, as well as national and historical influences of

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 208. Allport laid out his theory of hierarchical causation in chapter 13, “Theories of Prejudice.” The only real historical treatment of Allport’s book is Frances Cherry, “The Nature of *The Nature of Prejudice*,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 36 (Fall 2000) 489-98, in which she outlines the “democratic” process by which Allport used his prejudice seminar at Harvard, and his students work for the class, to develop the book.

<sup>136</sup> See chapter 3. Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*; Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom; a Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: Viking Press, 1939).

long duration” all worked on and through the personality.<sup>137</sup> More to the point, though, Allport’s intellectual orientation also reflected the larger contours of research into prejudice. Simply put, the volume of research into prejudice and personality exploded during the 1950s. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer returned to Germany soon after the War, but their departure did little to dampen enthusiasm for deploying the research instrument they helped to create across the United States. In the early 1950s alone, more than sixty independent projects based on the methods pioneered in *The Authoritarian Personality* got underway, most of which aimed to zero in on the class or ethnic correlates of authoritarianism.<sup>138</sup> Not that the F-scale was the only such instrument. In 1951, a young psychologist named Harrison Gough devised an alternate test of prejudice and personality, the Pr-Scale, which he also began to administer widely.<sup>139</sup> Further, a vast literature took shape around the origins of the prejudice personality in childhood, focusing in on the role of parenting styles in generating prejudiced personalities and the possibilities for educational institutions to reverse the syndrome.<sup>140</sup>

While undoubtedly reflecting the increasing ‘individualization’ and ‘psychologization’ of white racial prejudice, the causes creating this broader pattern of research and thinking about prejudice were complex. As compared to conducting large-scale and comprehensive social research projects, the personality test proved to be a cost-effective and easily administered piece of psychological technology, one that could be

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>138</sup> These were reviewed in Richard Christie, *Studies in the Scope and Method of “The Authoritarian Personality”* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1954).

<sup>139</sup> On Gough’s work and a recent effort to reapply it, see Edward Dunbar, “The Prejudiced Personality, Racism, and Anti-Semitism: The PR Scale Forty Years Later,” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 65 (1995): 270-77,

<sup>140</sup> Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, chapters 18, 25, and 27, on, respectively, “The Young Child,” “The Prejudiced Personality,” and “The Tolerant Personality.” See also Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, chapters 2 and 3 generally, and chapters 6 and 7 on the development of the social science case against segregation.

delegated to assistants or even graduate students (including one I know), and promised concrete results. Also, the post-war decade represented the high-tide of Freudianism in America as both a tool of social critique and a guide to academic research, which fixed attention on early family dynamics—and on “Momism” as the cause of social problems.<sup>141</sup> As historian Leah Gordon has demonstrated, some of the most promising work on the role of social structures in shaping prejudiced behavior in the early 1950s ran afoul of funding agencies.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, the Commission of Community Interrelations, the “action research” arm of the American Jewish Committee, conducted a host of groundbreaking studies of prejudice and integrated housing in the early 1950s—finding, among other things, that co-habitation drastically reduced prejudice—but these too became too politically contentious for the AJC (as did the integrated housing movement more generally, of course).<sup>143</sup> Even contingency played its part, as two of the more promising scholars on prejudice, anthropologist Scudder Mekeel and sociologist Horace Cayton, were never able to bring to fruition their ambitious and paradigm busting research agendas—the former thwarted by a visit from the grim reaper at the age of 48, and the latter a victim of intellectual paralysis.<sup>144</sup>

But, this trend also reflected the appeal of the vision of society—the vision of American whiteness—that had always undergirded the discourse on the “prejudiced personality,” a vision that Gordon Allport’s work laid bare. Allport generated his vision

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<sup>141</sup> Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998) chapter 4; Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2000) chapter 2.

<sup>142</sup> Leah Gordon, “The Question of Prejudice: Social Science, Education, and the Struggle to Define the ‘Race Problem’ in Mid-Century America, 1935-1965” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), chapter 1, addressing the Rockefeller Foundation and Race Relations research from 1926-63.

<sup>143</sup> Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, chapter 4.

<sup>144</sup> See Scudder Mekeel, “Cultural Aids to Constructive Race Relations,” *Mental Hygiene* 29 (April 1945) 177-89; Scudder Mekeel, “Concerning Race Prejudice,” *Phyon* 5 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 1944) 305-13; Horace R. Cayton, “The Psychological Approach to Race Relations,” *Reed College Bulletin* 25 (November 1946).

as a solution to an otherwise intractable dilemma. By his reckoning, at least eighty percent of Americans displayed prejudice, and prejudice tended to ‘spread like a grease spot’ through the entire personality. Read against the grain, the interpretive matrix he established in *The Nature of Prejudice* made for an even bleaker picture: “prejudice” was our history of racial exploitation, weaved into our culture and our social patterns, coloring our everyday encounters, stitched into our personalities, tinting the lens by which we viewed the world. As a conception of racism—as a vision of American society—this was simply untenable. Allport ‘solved’ this problem by dividing people into categories of “we” and “the bigot.” For him, this was a stopgap measure. “The bigot” was the real problem, but “we” still had prejudices we needed to confront. Allport intended this as a heuristic, a didactic interpretation of the American race problem. “The bigot” was a mirror, a warning, an image of what we could become. And its opposite, his image of the tolerant type, was an ideal we should be seeking to attain.

Moreover, the basic structure of Allport’s conception of prejudice and society was born of the 1930s. His was a hopeful critique of the American “personality” extended to the problem of race prejudice. It was a critique born at a moment when questioning the American way of life, and divining ways of changing it was not merely appropriate—it was mandatory. Allport’s thinking on prejudice was tied in with his assumption that America was becoming a more democratic, more egalitarian place. By the 1950s, all this had changed. The culture of radicalism and possibility born of deprivation and crisis had become a culture of reaction and limits in the age of abundance. In this new context, Allport’s pragmatic division of the American whiteness—of the “we” and “the bigot”—crystalized into a rigid pattern of normal and abnormal, non-bigoted and bigoted

personalities, ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Prejudice was a problem of *them*—bigoted personalities. As for the rest of ‘us,’ ‘we’ *were already* “mature,” democratic types, or at worst, possessed minor character flaws that we could work on.

The ‘American dilemma’ was not a struggle *within* the minds of the “white American,” then. Rather, it was a Manichean moral struggle between mostly normal, healthy, liberal Americans, on one side, and “the bigots,” including most of the South, on the other. The appeal of the concept of the “prejudiced personality” in its several guises stemmed from the vision of American society that was refracted through it—a vision that comported nicely with the tempered brand of liberalism that survived into the Cold War era, a vision of America as a nation of robust selves, living in a mostly just society, struggling gallantly to overcome its legacy of prejudice, and moving forward into a new world.

## **Conclusion: The Ironies of American Anti-Racism**

Harper & Brothers published *An American Dilemma* in January of 1944. Despite its substantial monetary and intellectual investment in the project, the Carnegie Corporation failed to launch much of a public relations campaign for the book's publication, while the editors at Harper, justly concerned about the marketability of a fifteen hundred-page work of social science, printed only a limited number of copies. Part of the blame for the slow roll-out of the book lay with Myrdal himself, who departed the U.S. for his native Sweden before completing the manuscript, leaving the final revisions and the early publicity to his trusted assistant, Arnold M. Rose (who was, it deserves to be noted, a graduate student at the time). Rose's mastery over the subject and his dogged determination made him an effective defender of the project in the years ahead, but in that first year he lacked the intellectual authority and the irrepressible energy that Myrdal brought to everything he did. Ultimately, though, none of this mattered much. The trickle of early reviews eventually turned into a steady stream, and that stream into a flood— *The New Republic*, *Life*, *Time*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *The New York Times*. Before long, nearly every major outlet of American intellectual life, academic and popular, weighed in on the monumental importance of the book.<sup>1</sup> By the early 1950s, the language of *An American Dilemma* had become the language of the American “race problem.”

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<sup>1</sup> On the publication of *An American Dilemma*, as well as immediate and longer term responses to the book, see Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), especially chapters 6 and 7.

Myrdal's book gave voice to a profound transformation in American political culture. The postwar moment, it turned out, needed *An American Dilemma*. The American people needed a way to understand the significance of the world-historical events through which they had passed, as well as their place in them. They needed a way to make sense of the problems of race and race prejudice, which remained maddeningly obscure despite having played a pivotal role in those events, both at home and overseas. And, they needed to see a path towards a future of peace and prosperity around the world. Myrdal's book satisfied those needs. By casting "the Negro problem" as a struggle that played out in the hearts and minds of every white American—a struggle that could be won, and whose resolution would determine the fate of the nation—he tapped into the optimism and sense of possibility that characterized the postwar moment. Moreover, written in a moral-psychological idiom, his vision resonated with a liberal middle-class readership whose political relevance was on the rise. More than two decades after the book's publication, the durability and power of Myrdal's conception of white racism registered in the thinking of a young, African American civil rights leader—albeit with the tone of a man whose personal experiences led him to a more biting assessment of white America's mind. In *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos and Community* (1968), the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed that "Ever since the birth of our nation, white America has had schizophrenic personality on the question of race." "She had been torn between selves," he continued, "a self in which she proudly professed great principles of democracy and a self in which she sadly practiced the antithesis of democracy."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press,



The significance of *An American Dilemma* defies easy estimation. As historians have noted, the book steeled the spines of liberal race-reformers, and carved out intellectual space in which the burgeoning Civil Rights movement could press its claims. But, it also had two other effects, both of which bear on the history of anti-racism that I have laid out in these pages. The book rejuvenated the ‘civic unity movement’ that coalesced among inter-faith religious organizations and secular liberal activists during the War to promote social harmony. Numbering more than five-hundred by 1945, and headlined by groups like the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, and the National Conference on Christians and Jews, this loosely-jointed movement followed Myrdal’s lead in the postwar years.<sup>3</sup> They took up the cause of combatting anti-black “race prejudice” and advancing racial integration as their own. Marshaling their extensive resources, and leveraging the appeals to racial and religious tolerance made by a host of cultural luminaries in the late ‘40s and 50s—none more famous than Frank Sinatra, whose movie-short and song, “The House I Live In” (1945), marked the beginning of decades of anti-prejudice activism on the part of the great crooner—this movement conducted a broad-ranging public campaign against white racial prejudice and discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

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1967), 68. Quoted in Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal*, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> This number comes from the Julius Rosenwald Fund’s *Directory of Agencies in Race Relations* (Chicago: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1945), cited in Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1964 [1942, 1943, 1951]), 17. The groups created the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials (NAIRO) in 1947. See Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>4</sup> The cultural politics of the film are complicated, written as a folk ballad by an African America blues singer, Sinatra changed the words to down play race in favor of religion. See Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 155-59. On the AJCongress, AJCommittee, and the ADL, see Svonkin.

At its base, this public campaign against prejudice in all its forms rested on a few foundational assumptions. Encapsulated in the lyrics to one of the most famous songs of one of the most famous films of the postwar years, *South Pacific* (1949), this movement proceeded from the belief that “You've got to be taught/To hate and fear... It's got to be drummed/In your dear little ear. You've got to be carefully taught.”<sup>5</sup> Reiterated in countless Hollywood productions, training films aimed at school-age children, public school curricula, government sponsored public relations campaigns, pamphlets distributed through religious and civil organizations, magazine articles, and even cartoons, this basic message emerged as a kind of popular, anti-prejudice common sense in the 1950s and 1960s. In this guise, racial (or religious) prejudice stemmed from holding pernicious, factually-errant attitudes about groups different from oneself, a collection of beliefs learned through childhood that guided a person's subsequent behavior toward others. Because these attitudes were learned, the logic was that they could be unlearned through education, especially when that education was targeted at children. Focused on both teaching children that “hate” was wrong, as well as instilling in them an appreciation of (certain narrowly drawn) differences between groups, the central thrust of was to prevent the inculcation of prejudices before they could take root.

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<sup>5</sup> “You've Got to be Carefully Taught,” *South Pacific* (1949). Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II:  
You've got to be taught/To hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught/From year to year,  
It's got to be drummed/In your dear little ear  
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid/Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade,/You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,/ Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate, You've got to be carefully taught!

Besides invigorating this public campaign against racism, Myrdal's book also stimulated an insatiable demand for social scientific and psychological research into white racial prejudice. Of course, two of the signal research projects of the postwar years—the efforts to document the effects of segregation on the psyches of African American children led by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark, and the work of the group of scholars assembled by Max Horkheimer to study the “authoritarian personality”—began before the publication of *An American Dilemma*. But, both efforts garnered much broader interest among other scholars, and the public at large, thanks to the attention to the problem of prejudice generated by Myrdal's book. Indeed, psychologists and social psychologists housed in major universities across the country began to deploy the F-scale test created by the “authoritarian personality” group widely, as well as other gauges of prejudice as a distinct personality type, creating something of an academic cottage industry dedicated to examining prejudice in the American mind. These were joined by ambitious studies of prejudice and interracial housing; a range of examinations of the psychological consequences of desegregation; narrower, controlled psychological experiments in group and identity formation; and a host of studies into the best means of changed racial attitudes.

This leads us to one of the chief ironies of postwar anti-racism. Like Myrdal, whose departure from the United States in 1943 also marked the end of his engagement with race or race prejudice, the intellectuals whose work I profile here, and who laid the foundation of the study of the psychology of race prejudice, did *not* actively contribute to this vast outpouring of research. John Dollard's work on the South, and his “frustration and aggression” theory, were widely cited, and informed

many postwar analyses of both southern racism as well as the psychology of race prejudice more broadly. But, after focusing on the psychological stresses of combat soldiers during the War, Dollard turned his attentions toward more abstract questions about learning and imitation. Likewise, Gordon Allport, whose *The Nature of Prejudice* became the standard college text on the subject for decades, shifted his interests toward the psychology of religion, among other topics. Allport remained in demand as a public speaker and expert on prejudice until his death in 1967, and he did conduct a few small-scale experiments on prejudice in South Africa, and prejudice and religious belief. But, this work never gained much traction in the rapidly expanding field of prejudice research he had helped to establish and map out. And, both Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer returned to Germany after the defeat of Nazism, where they reestablished the Institute for Social Research.

Hadley Cantril and Ashley Montagu took opposite paths in the postwar years, both leading them away from the study of prejudice. As chapter three noted, both men became involved in large, collaborative projects under the auspices of the United Nations in the late '40s and early '50s, and both men felt the sting of conservative backlash as a result of their work. In response, Cantril largely withdrew from the public eye, focusing his attention on perfecting the methods for gauging public opinion he had pioneered before the War. Montagu, who also came under withering scrutiny for the positions he staked out in the UNESCO *Statement on Race*, permanently gave up teaching in 1955 in favor of the life of a public intellectual. While he continued to update *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* until his death, he began to write more broadly on gender differences—more specifically, on *The Natural*

*Superiority of Women* (1953), as he titled one of his books—human biology, the instinct for cooperation, nuclear disarmament, and other matters. Erudite, engaging, and always looking the part of the professor, Montagu began appearing on television in the late 1950s, and became a regular guest on Johnny Carson’s “Tonight Show” in the early 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

Ruth Benedict, who died in 1948, only sixty-one years of age, left much work unfinished. Her premature death, however, did spare her of the ignominy that befell her student and collaborator, Gene Weltfish. Weltfish had helped Benedict redraft *Race: Science and Politics* into a pamphlet intended for wide distribution, *The Races of Mankind*. For this and her other anti-racist activities, she became a prime target of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), whose witch-hunting members questioned her about both her own and Benedict’s political affiliations. Nor was Benedict (through Weltfish) the only Boasian anti-racist to draw fire from HUAC.<sup>7</sup> Paul Radin, who made use of Marx throughout *The Racial Myth* (1934), also came under investigation in the 1950s for his ties to Communist organizations—ties that were in fact real and extensive.<sup>8</sup> Although he continued to bring his anti-racism into the classroom, he too retreated from writing about race after the War. Herbert Seligmann wrote *Race Against Man* based largely on his thirty years of anti-racist journalism and activism. But, the book also marked the end of that career, after which he turned his attention to poetry and literature. Having written three books on “race-thinking”—three books exploring the dark underbelly of Western civilization—

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete list of Montagu’s TV appearances see “Ashley Montagu” on the Internet Movie Data Base. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0598744/>. Accessed on December 1, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> David H. Price, *Threatening anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI’s Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists* (Duke University Press, 2004), chapter 6 on Gene Weltfish.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-206.

Jacques Barzun retrained his eye to appreciate the best of European and American thought and culture. He too never returned to the topic of race. (Born in 1907, he resides today in San Antonio, Texas—104 years old!).

As I have shown in these pages, the intellectuals who went in search of white racial prejudice in the 1930s and 1940s came away from their encounters with very different conclusions than did Gunnar Myrdal. By way of their psychological, psychoanalytical, historical, and cultural conceptions of human behavior, they saw that “race prejudice” held deep psychological significance for white Americans (and Europeans), and would not be dislodged easily. And, they knew that, far from an atavistic or pre-modern cultural formation, destined to wither away under the dynamic pressures of modernization, white supremacist beliefs and social structures were themselves thoroughly modern, and well adapted to the contemporary world. Indeed, for many of them, the emotional root of racism’s appeal traced to the psychological stresses that attended life in the modern age. Although these intellectuals did not directly contribute to the outpouring of postwar research on prejudice, many of their ideas, modes of analysis, and insights proved highly influential for the collection of social scientists and psychologists who did.

This leads us to the second irony of American anti-racism. Much of the research into the psychology of prejudice produced after the War recapitulated the broader findings of the collection of intellectuals whose work I profile here. In doing so, this research—which had been called forth by *An American Dilemma*—undermined both the basic conception of racism that Myrdal had proffered, as well as the more simplistic notion of “race prejudice” that animated the popular anti-

prejudice campaign he helped to inspire. As study after study revealed, “race prejudice” did not stem from discrete attitudes or stereotypes that could be isolated—and eliminated—from the individual psyche, as much that passed for anti-racist common sense held. Nor did Americans experience the plight of African Americans as a ‘dilemma’ they felt compelled to solve. In 1964, during a symposium on “the race problem” twenty years after *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal admitted that “Americans simply don’t have a bad conscience because Negroes were brought over here on slave ships.” Although his statement tacitly repudiated one of the core arguments of his book, he maintained his belief that “race prejudice” was a matter of *conscience* at all. He evinced little awareness that, as Dollard or Cantril sketched its contours, ‘the racist white psyche’ inculcated the “gains” or “frame of reference” of white supremacy into its sense of self. Lacking the sensitivity to culture and history displayed by Ruth Benedict or Jacques Barzun, he persisted in his belief that the racist threads could be extricated from the fabric of American culture without fundamentally altering—or destroying—the tapestry itself. His faith in the curative power of capitalist modernity seemingly untroubled, he could not imagine, as Montagu and Allport did, that the changes wrought by modernity itself might drive white prejudice.

Considering the relative perspicacity of these intellectuals, though, leads us to the final, bitter irony of American anti-racism. As I have tried to show, the distinct psycho-cultural framework these intellectuals constructed to explain their encounters with ‘the racist white psyche’ generated a host of key, enduring insights into the psychological dynamics of white racial prejudice. More broadly, they developed a

sense of the complex, interlocking economic, political, cultural, and psychological forces that gave rise to racial hatred, violence, exclusion, and domination in its various manifestations. By focusing their attentions on ‘the racist white psyche,’ they were able to connect the drives that animated it from within to the forces buffeting it from without. Of course, their thinking had real limits. Drawing these connections depended on maintaining a clear field of vision of the broader geography of American racism. But, the tighter they focused on ‘the racist white psyche,’ the harder it became to maintain such a vision, and the harder it became to see the connections. The pitfalls of this perspective on racism became clear in the 1950s, and were made so by Carey McWilliams.

In 1951, the anti-racist lawyer, journalist, and activist Carey McWilliams published a revised edition of *Brothers Under the Skin*, his classic 1942 survey of the racial conflicts wracking wartime America.<sup>9</sup> McWilliams cut the profile of the middle-class Popular Front. Although he was never a Communist, the Great Depression, and his encounters with California’s labor strife in the 1930s had made him an American radical. He struck up a personal and intellectual friendship with fellow Los Angelino and prominent cultural pluralist Louis Adamic, whose cultural politics made McWilliams a pluralist, and sensitized him early to the threat of fascism. A lawyer by training, he took up the cases of Mexican and Mexican Americans who fell prey to California’s racially-tilted scales of justice. Besides *Brothers*, he penned a series of books decrying the treatment of Japanese Americans and Mexican migrant workers, *Prejudice: Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (1944) and *North From Mexico* (1948), as well as attacking American

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<sup>9</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Brothers under the skin* (Little, Brown, 1964).



anti-Semitism, *A Mask for Privilege* (1948).<sup>10</sup> He was also an avid consumer of social and psychological thought, including of many of the intellectuals portrayed here. His books, then, combined outraged crusading journalism, sophisticated analyses of the way the power and psychology fused around race, and an ethnographic sensibility of the multiplicity of America—and its multiplicity of race problems. In 1955, having written for *The Nation* for a few years, McWilliams took over as the magazine's editor, a position he would hold for the next two decades. For an organ that could credibly claim to have been right on race for nearly a century at that point, entering into a period in which questions of racial justice were again burning their way into the national conscience, McWilliams was an obvious choice.

McWilliams used the new introduction of the reissue to stake out a bold claim on America's future: "The year 1950 marks the beginning of the permanent crisis of race relations." But, he saved his more incisive criticism of contemporary anti-racist thought and activism to the book's final chapter, "Beyond Civil Rights." McWilliams thought that the "mushrooming" of the "civic unity" movement represented the first popular uprising against racism in America since the Civil War, and constituted "one of the most remarkable developments in community social action of the last quarter century."<sup>11</sup> The failures of this movement to develop a critical "point of view" on the nature of the race problem, though, tempered his enthusiasm. Citing *The Authoritarian Personality*, he chided the facile notion that racial conflict grew out of misunderstandings over the nature of race. Speaking to the larger project of anti-racist

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<sup>10</sup> Carey McWilliams, *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948); Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice; Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944); Carey McWilliams and Matt S. Meier, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 2nd ed. (Praeger Paperback, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, 17–8.

education, he warned that “racial myths can be deflated in a manner that creates the illusion that discrimination stems from such misunderstandings, and can be easily dispelled by education. This faith rested on an underlying confusion of the relationship between ‘prejudice’ and ‘discrimination,’ which was itself part of a wider confusion of “race with class; ‘cultural conflicts’ with social conflicts; and ‘cultural differences’ with economic relationships.” And, through these confusions, the ultimate end of anti-racist activism begins to appear as “a bright green island in an azure sea, an abstract social goal or daydream, unrelated to the larger social forces which make up the continents or land masses.”<sup>12</sup>

McWilliams did not reserve his criticisms only for the more popular manifestations of anti-racist activism. Rather, he turned his gaze on “current psychological theories of race relations,” particularly those “almost exclusively concerned with prejudice, which is discussed as though it were the cause of discrimination.”<sup>13</sup> McWilliams did not deny that such theories provided “valuable aids to an understanding of race relations.” Indeed, throughout his work he made ready use of psychology. And, he paid homage to the insights accrued from “the psychological theory of prejudice,” including explaining “the variable and exceptional,” devising therapeutic and educational approaches for attacking individual prejudice, and accounting for the successes and failures of anti-racist “propaganda,” among others. But, he maintained, these ideas “addressed the individual problem of prejudice, not the social problem of discrimination.” Cutting to the heart of the problem, McWilliams cautioned that “To make a theory of the

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<sup>12</sup> McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, 313.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

function of prejudice in the psychic economy of the individual do double duty as a theory of group discrimination is to confuse different, if related, levels of meaning.”<sup>14</sup>

Coming from an intellectual as well-versed in social and psychological analyses as McWilliams, and one deeply engaged with the daily struggles against racism, this critique cut to the bone. Beginning in the 1930s, the search for ‘the racist white psyche’ brought the intellectuals I have written about here into a landscape of psychological needs and desires, social structures and community mores, political and economic struggles between elites and masses, competitive social orders that pitted racial groups against each other in desperate competition, and the desperate times caused by political and economic collapse. From the outset, they sought to connect these larger features to the psychology of white “race prejudice.” Over the course of the two decades that I follow them, though, as these intellectuals went deeper into the psychological terrain of ‘the racist white psyche,’ they lost site of those larger features. The consequences against which McWilliams warned—the consequences of making the psychological stand in for the social—became most apparent in the work of Gordon Allport. Allport, whose personal intellectual commitment to preserving the sanctity of individual agency led him to sever the connections between ‘personality’ and ‘culture’ or ‘society,’ redrew the essential conflict at the heart of the American racism as one between deracinated bigots and constitutionally-tolerant “mature personalities.” In doing so, he presented a conception of “race prejudice” that, for all its moral gravity and dramatic tension, stood curiously detached from the social, political, and economic conflicts on going in the United States and the world.

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<sup>14</sup> McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, 315–6.

McWilliams's analysis of the pitfalls of over-determining the psychological dimensions of race prejudice pointed the way to a deeper problem, one that was only coming to fruition in the early 1950s. To his eye, the misapplication of the psychological conceptions of prejudice constituted more than a mistake or a confusion. When "offered as theories of race relations," he thought, "psychological theories of prejudice, exploit individual exceptions"—individuals who exhibit very high or very low levels of prejudice—"in a manner that detracts attention from the rule."<sup>15</sup> The rule, of course, was that prejudice constituted the psychological or affective component of the "'strategies of dominance'" by which "privileged social groups" maintained their political, economic, and social position. McWilliams worried that, "by failing to recognize the limitations" of such "widely prevalent theories," anti-racist activists and intellectuals were in "danger of being shunted into a dead end" or of raising "false hopes of easy victories."<sup>16</sup>

In voicing his concerns, McWilliams anticipated the final, bitterly ironic direction that the main thrust of American anti-racist thought was turning. These psychological theories of racism were themselves crystalizing into an a distinct ideological formation, one that took a nominally anti-racist stance, but also served to delimit a broader understanding of the strategies of racial domination that sustained American white supremacy. Indeed, in its narrowly psychological variant, this ideology of *anti-racism* prevented a more penetrating attack on the social, political, and economic bulwarks of the racial order, and thereby became an agent active in supporting *racism*. Cloaked in this guise, white Americans could pick up the mantle

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<sup>15</sup> McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, 315.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 315–16.

of anti-racism, support the Civil Rights movement, and think of the United States as a nation dedicated to “freedom and justice for all.” White Americans could thus transcend ‘the racist white psyche,’ but for the millions of men and women of color who have been subjected to the brutal sting of discrimination in their daily lives, real liberation remained painfully elusive.